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JEALOUSY AND MEDICINE

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JEALOUSY AND MEDICINE

A Novel by
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JEALOUSY AND MEDICINE.

At seven o'clock in the evening, the lights went out all over the city.

At this moment, Widmar struck a match and cast a furious look at his watch. The man he was waiting for was already a quarter of an hour late. It was incredible !

Widmar unbuttoned his waistcoat for he was beginning to feel suffocated. He went to the window. " Hello ! What's happened to the light ? " he wondered.

He was foaming with rage and despair. Fifteen minutes' waiting had completely worn him out. He did not know what it meant. The man he was waiting for was known for his punctuality, and the meeting was for him, too, of the utmost importance.

" I'll teach him ! " repeated Widmar, coughing and panting.

He lit another match and looked at his watch. The hand—damn !—had not moved a hair's breadth even. He was breathing so hard that the matches kept on going out in his hand, one after the other, as if in a draught. He could not find a candle. For the second time he went to the open window and looked out, leaning his chest and stomach against the window-seat. A warm gust of air lifted old Widmar's greying beard and blew the hair into his open mouth ; then it tore the tie out of his waistcoat and whipped his fear-distorted face with it.

It was growing dim in the street. It was only at the corner, where the railings and gateway made Widmar's garden stand out against the houses, that the autumn trees still threw a splash of colour. By the door stood the concierge, ankle-deep in rust-hued leaves.

"Why has the light gone out?" shouted Widmar in a harsh voice. He was beside himself with rage.

"It's all over the city," replied the concierge.

"Damnation!" and Widmar shut the window.

Almost at the same instant, a ringing was heard for the first time in the long, white corridor of a certain, large building.

At this very moment, in the place where Gold, the tailor, lived, his children, Angela, a five-year-old girl, and Boruch, who was nine, were playing hide-and-seek.

It did not cause much trouble in this room when the light went out. The room was bright without it. It was a Friday, and candles were burning on the table with its white cloth.

"Look," Angela was saying, "the lamp in the street's out."

She had black, curly hair, dirty little paws and a sooty, black nose.

"I've got a lamp in my stomach," replied Boruch sulkily.

He was a queer creature, this youngster.

At the same instant, the tailor's brother, Isaac Gold, the switchboard operator, who had cut off the current a moment before, shouted across the machine-room with his hand on the lever:

"What's up? Blast you!"

The little city was bathed in a greyish autumn haze; only the street corner not far from old Widmar's house was brightened by the coloured splash of maples and plane-trees.

Hatless, Widmar rushed out to the porch. He thought somebody had knocked, but he could see no-one. The wind threw a handful of blood-red leaves in his face.

"Still, I haven't time to wait for him any longer!" he cried, brandishing his fist.

At this very instant the ringing was heard for the second time in the big white building which stood at the end of the town. At once, a woman dressed in white, with a candle in her hand, came running breathlessly along the corridor. The ringing stopped.

The little city lay quiet, plunged in darkness. The black silhouettes of a few passers-by went gliding along as in a dream. All that could be seen through the huge café windows were little marble tables, miserably lit by candles.

"Something's happened at the power-station!" the concierge shouted to Widmar.

The hot and clammy wind clung to the face like a poultice. Reddened leaves went whirling around, like flames springing from the bowels of the earth. Purple leaves rose hovering, like reddish steam, into the haze above the city.

Then, after some routine comings and goings, a tomb-like silence prevailed in the big, white house again. The entrance gate opened noiselessly and a big, black car rolled out, swaying gently on its springs. Suddenly it changed gear and dashed ahead at full speed, with a great sounding of horn and klaxon.

Little Angela sat down under the window and sobbed.

"Why doesn't daddy come? He ought to be back."

"Daddy's got a lamp in his stomach," whispered the youngster.

He was the oddest child. He gazed at the seven candles burning on the table, and then looked out of the window: mist and reddened leaves.

"Hear the horn? That's a car."

Isaac Gold, the electrician, did not let go of the lever he held and went on cursing the whole factory.

"Are you ever going to find out what's happened? Dirty beggars!"

Widmar was walking up and down at the street corner in front of the porch.

"I shan't learn anything," he muttered in despair. "I shan't learn anything."

At this very moment, in Batory Street, by the great statesman's statue, the man Widmar was waiting for, the unhappy tailor Abraham Gold, Angela's and Boruch's father and the electrician's brother, held out both hands in front of him and looked at the sky, stiffening as he stood.

The whole tragedy lay in the fact that old Widmar had a young wife.

If he had listened to his friends, he would have chosen a better lot and not married at all. Alas, his cursed, weak heart had dragged him into the torture chamber where there were tongs, scissors and pincers, monstrous traps from which there was no escape. Who knows how many years he would still have to wait, consumed by doubt, when every minute was a needle thrust under his nails, and night a red-hot iron on which he was roasted alive? For there is no torture more cruel than doubt; just as there is no limit to the meanness of which a true and great love is capable.

It was about this very meanness that Widmar was thinking when he had met the tailor, Abraham Gold, a week before.

The tailor was a very ugly old man with a heart of gold. At least, that was the opinion all his customers had about

him. But it turned out afterwards to be quite different.

"Listen, Gold," Widmar had said when they were both seated on the terrace of the local café. "Listen, Gold, it came into my head that all this is nothing more than a miserable fraud on your part."

The burning autumn wind was blowing in violent gusts. The white linen blinds with blue stripes kept slapping like sails.

"Oh! Don't say such things, sir!" protested the tailor sadly.

He leant his bald, wrinkled head first on his right hand, then on his left, and gazed at Widmar, motionless, while his faded eyes filled with tears. This stare, in its utter fixity, gave Widmar a feeling of intense repulsion. He was abnormally sensitive and suspected everyone, even this miserable tailor, of looking down on him with contempt.

"Why have you aged so quickly, sir?" he asked point-blank.

He felt a kind of shiver and experienced an instinctive aversion for this shrivelled face. That was why, perhaps, he called Gold "sir" for the first time.

"Look at me. We're probably the same age, but see how well I'm keeping. To be quite candid, I'm only fifty. And you?"

"I'm thirty-eight," replied the tailor.

"What?"

Two men reading papers at a nearby table looked up inquisitively. They were wearing sports shirts without jackets. The wind blew and the shirts inflated like white balloons.

"Thirty-eight," repeated the tailor with an air of shame, as if he wanted to say, "Pardon me, sir."

"Well, well," muttered Widmar incredulously.

He thought to himself: "How could I have believed such a thing, even for a moment?" He looked at the horrible, emaciated old man sitting beside him, and once again felt a shiver run through him. He had the impression of being seated next to a ventilator, or something even worse, but he rejected the idea of the latter possibility.

"Let's get back to our business," he began again in a cold, forced tone. "What did you see last night, Gold?"

"The same as always. I know that curtain by heart already. Only, Mr. Widmar, I can't do it"

The tailor threw him an imploring look. The poor old chap looked like a man who is going to burst into tears any moment. Yet in spite of this Widmar was still uneasy, suspecting him of contempt. They were both silent a while. Then Widmar said:

"Listen, Gold, it's you who make all my suits."

"Yes," replied the tailor in a low voice.

"Look here, you've known me for a good ten years. As for me, I've not the slightest idea, for instance, whether you even have a wife. Perhaps you don't even know what suffering means?"

Widmar suddenly realised that he had said something incredibly foolish, for he reddened to the ears and exclaimed furiously: "There's no suffering! No! I want the truth, only the truth!"

"There is no suffering," the tailor repeated like an echo.

"I suspect you, Gold, of common blackmail."

Red, purple, violet, Widmar, it seemed, would explode and blow up the whole café. The tailor took his hands

from his face and held them out in a beseeching gesture.

“ Don’t threaten me, Mr. Widmar ”

The gale threw a cloud of dust over the terrace and tore the cloths off some of the tables. It was terribly hot, but yet Widmar was still distressed by the cold. As well as the wind there was decidedly a draught somewhere. A pestilential breath.

“ Waiter ! ” he shouted in fury.

He was like an enraged animal, as always where she was concerned. At such moments he became, with startling rapidity, two distinct personalities. One Widmar was born and swelled to monstrous proportions ; he had bloodshot eyes, foamed at the mouth and was bursting with rage. The other Widmar shrank visibly, like a punctured bladder ; he curled up in a corner, trembling, and was frightened of himself.

“ Waiter ! ” bellowed the first. “ A double, a double at once ! Haven’t you forgotten to shut the ventilator over my head there ? ”

He suddenly hit the table with his fist.

“ You—why are you looking at me like that ? ”

Gold the tailor was sitting on the very edge of his chair. His crumpled jacket was covered with down and feathers. It seemed that down and feathers were even growing on his head. He stared with a vague, motionless eye, and there was absolutely nothing but servile fear in his look : but Widmar felt in it something contemptuous, and even some hidden, mocking thought. Nothing could have rid his mind of this stupid idea.

“ Mr. Widmar,” whispered the tailor.

His yellowish, trembling hands were outstretched in a violent gesture. He drew back in fright, so that his chair groaned beneath him.

" Mr. Widmar, my dear Mr. Widmar, I couldn't agree to it, not for anything in the world . . . for . . . you see . . . if you were to learn something for sure . . . in your state . . . you might . . . "

The horrible, dead hand at last reached Widmar and seized his waistcoat button convulsively. Widmar averted his eyes. He saw a dry, bony finger with a bluish nail, like that of a corpse.

" What ? " he asked.

The tailor's answer was light as a sigh, almost inaudible.

" You might, sir, commit God knows what . . . " he stammered.

That was all. A vague phrase which meant nothing. But the very banality of the phrase oppressed Widmar beyond words.

" Ough ! " he sighed after a moment, " you frightened me."

Then he bellowed :

" Waiter ! A double, a double at once ! Where is this damned ventilator of yours ? It's impossible to be shivering to death on a stifling day like this. Call the proprietor ! It stinks here like . . . " For the second time he did not finish and rejected the comparison that sprang to his mind.

Something icy, with an oppressive odour, was emanating from the tailor himself. He looked at him with hatred. It seemed that Gold felt this hatred and wriggled on his chair. Widmar felt the desire to squash him like a bug. He certainly would have done so but for his cursed weak heart. It was beating as if it would burst out of his breast.

" Ough ! " he groaned, " this cold, this dreadful cold ! "

In his fury, he was almost handsome. His face, framed in a black beard, his aquiline nose and flashing eyes, recalled the prophets. A young girl who was passing by them, alongside the table, looked at him in delight. This was the cause of his ruin! These young women! The older he grew the more he pleased them! But at this moment he did not even throw her a glance . . .

"Mr. Gold! You will do everything. You have children and you need money. How much could you do with, eh?"

He regretted his words. He should not have touched on this topic. And anyhow, to the devil with all this fussing! He breathed with difficulty. His left side palpitated every minute. He was panting as if he had run very quickly towards the scene of an accident.

The tailor threw him a long, agonised look, as if he were praying for something.

"Mr. Widmar," he said suddenly. "Boruch asked me today why I am so little."

"Boruch? Who's that?"

"My son. 'Why are you so little, daddy? Are you a little boy?'"

Widmar listened very attentively. There was something soothing in this strange story. "My God," he thought at the same time, "if only there were such an atmosphere between us, too! Why can't we have children, oh my beloved!"

"'I'm not a little boy,' I answered, 'It's only that I'm short'."

"'Oh, I see! You're a hunchback, then'."

"'No,' I answered, 'I'm not a hunchback. I'm simply short. Look, there are tall people and short people, aren't there?'"

"'Oh, I see, so you're a dachshund, then'."

"What rubbish you're telling me!"

Widmar grew suddenly angry. He grasped his left side and began rattling in the throat.

"My heart's going to burst."

"Eh, they are silly things, really," agreed the tailor in a whisper.

He was ashamed, as he had been when confessing to his thirty-eight years.

"But my heart, that doesn't mean anything," said Widmar, and stood up heavily. A marvellous idea struck him. "Boruch?" he thought. "It's good to know that."

"Gold," he began again, "you could have your son educated with these dollars and make an engineer of him." And he broke off, threatening and tempting at the same time.

His fiery, black eyes glided over the tailor's silhouette. Abraham Gold stood up beside him.

"Where has he picked up all that down?" thought Widmar in passing. "A whole eiderdown!"

It was obvious that the tailor was going through a mental struggle. After a moment, a few thick, dirty tears escaped from his reddened eye and ran down his nose; yet the other eye remained clear and calm. Gold opened his big mouth as if to say something. Widmar thought he had not heard.

"What?" He stooped towards his lips. He could still make nothing out.

"What?" he repeated, bringing his face quite close. He felt so dizzy then that he swayed. From the tailor's mouth there breathed on him a dreadful cold and stench. It was no ventilator. His second comparison was the truer: the odour of the morgue was breathing on him!

It was the first occasion for some time that Widmar forgot his unhappiness, and he looked at the tailor with compassion. He used to entertain similar feelings at funerals.

"We shall meet tomorrow," Gold brought out with difficulty, "tomorrow, sir, I'll tell you."

"Don't bother me with these delays!" shouted Widmar. "I'm not to be taken in as easily as that!" He banged his fist on the table.

The gale, as violent as he was, went whistling and shrieking over the terrace. In one corner it blew over a red sunshade, and almost threw the two men into each other's arms.

At that same moment, a woman walked past, quite near, and said as if to herself: "But what do young women do when they're left at home alone?"

The big, red umbrella pressed against them like a living thing. At last it fell between them, hiding the café from them. There was a silence. "That must have been an hallucination," said Widmar to himself, and as the woman disappeared he gazed at her back in terror.

"Tomorrow, at the same time," he announced, and left without offering the tailor his hand.

He did not want to touch this old man who was rotting alive. After all, who knew whether the old man might not be sneering at him and feeling inward contempt for him. If that were really so he would never forgive himself for the whole affair.

A wave of distrust, some kind of persecution mania, seized him anew. He turned his head towards the door. The hideous tailor, half dead, was standing by the broken glass in the middle of the café, talking to the waiter. He appeared ashamed and very unhappy. Widmar wiped his face with his handkerchief and rushed out into the street. "Such meanness?" he was thinking.

He was choking under the reproaches of his conscience. His right hand had pins and needles, perhaps because, on his arrival, he had shaken hands with the tailor ; so he stuffed it into his pocket and bolted down the street like the wind. He jostled passers-by without apology and without stopping, dashing on with ever increasing speed. "Such meanness ! Such meanness !" he was thinking of himself. "I would never have imagined that love and meanness were only one and the same thing."

Before his eyes there persisted the image of this malicious girl who had passed him in the café. "What nonsense was she supposed to say ? Perhaps the wind whistled it ? "

Uneasiness and a feeling he knew by heart, a feeling which dominated him completely, suddenly took possession of him, hiding the whole world from him. The street vanished under a veil of mourning, the sun swayed above the houses like a black ball. Every man he met was a traitor and a corpse, every woman a fantastic flower and a prostitute. "Only to get home quickly !" he mumbled like a lunatic. The gale, like a diabolical force, swept him towards his fate.

All at once, at the corner, he caught sight of a woman in a little, red-striped beret, with one end of a red scarf fluttering around her neck.*

He stood rooted to the ground. "It's impossible," he groaned. The sight of her frightened him as much as an infernal apparition. Everything danced before his eyes at a crazy speed, and the tree against which he was leaning so as not to collapse, suddenly began to fall to the pavement.

The woman in the little red beret and scarf was coming towards him.

He looked at the scarlet covering her head and neck like a bull exhausted and frenzied to the point of madness.

The woman approaching was not alone ! A man in light trousers and navy blue jacket was walking beside her.

Then mist and darkness swallowed up everything forever and, instead of the beret and scarf, Widmar caught sight of a splash of blood. His aching heart seemed about to leap on to the pavement, and there was a violent hammering of someone's fists on his skull.

"I'm really ill," thought Widmar to himself. The giddiness and heart attack passed like a flash ; it could be seen that the woman had carmined lips and was blonde. She was not his wife.

He smiled with a false, vague smile, and hurried in pursuit. He still kept his hand in his pocket as if to thrust his shame and infamy there. "I'm really ill," he repeated, "I need medical attention." For him, something at once ridiculous and distressing was associated with these words, "medical attention," for he smiled and his features assumed an expression both unpleasant and amused. But as he neared home he controlled himself completely, and entered the porch with a firm, steady step.

He found his wife in the dining-room. She was sitting down, bent over a book. He noticed at once that she was holding the book upside down. He lowered his lids to conceal the malicious flash in his eyes, and said in a restrained voice :

"You must be reading something very interesting ? "

"I'm not reading at all," she replied. She stood up and kissed him on the lips. "What's the matter with you ? "

He made no answer, horrified by this kiss. He moved aside. This kiss had no feeling at all. Widmar had the

impression of having touched a piece of paper with his lips.

He suppressed a shiver of disgust, however, and stroked his wife's black, curly hair.

"Nobody's been?" he asked nonchalantly. He was afraid to look at her lest he should see the lie in her eyes. He was relieved when she said no, although he did not believe her.

"Nobody?" he repeated. "I thought I met the doctor."

She did not even quiver. Her eyes were as calm and expressionless as ever, and nothing could be read in them, absolutely nothing. Then old Widmar experienced his former incurable despair. Standing in front of his wife, he said slowly:

"Do you want me to discuss the . . . other matter again?"

He did not even hear her reply. A torturing procession of men, of despicable silhouettes, went filing through his brain, moving through his imagination like a platoon of spectres. He knew all these men by heart; it was not in vain that, all night long, he used to repeat the litany of these debauchees' names. He felt that soon he would burst out with everything. *Christe eleison! Kyrie eleison!* Captain of the first squadron of light horse, Andrew Rozjemczy; General Staff Major, Zgar-Wisowski; doctor of laws and illegality, Kroczyński, and so many others. *Kyrie eleison!*

The list of these accursed names was endless. Struggling against the memories that kept recurring to him like bouts of acidity, he repeated: "Rebecca, Rebecca . . ."

Against the background of the window he saw his wife's dark profile and waited with an air of supplication. A single gesture of her hand, a shake of the head would

have been enough to make the whole army of seducers vanish from his memory. But his wife did not make this gesture, and Widmar decided swiftly: "No, no. I'll say nothing to her now." In spite of his nervous condition he had become prudent and cautious again, for he only lost his head at moments when his love was moderate; when his love reached a climax and was joined there with baseness, he regained his self-confidence. "I'll tell her nothing, but I'll show her what the truth is."

"I've been very tired the last few days, you mustn't be angry with me," he said deceitfully.

"But I'm not angry with you," and, placidly, she drew the curtains.

As he looked at her shoulders, so achingly beautiful, Widmar kept on repeating without rhyme or reason: "Rebecca, Rebecca" He would have given anything to know what this strange woman was thinking at this moment.

For two years he had been living with her, under the same roof, and he had only just discovered that he knew nothing about her at all. "Rebecca"

While he was groaning like this, looking in terror at the lovely line of her shoulders, he did not dream that exactly the same cry was rising in the soul of Dr. Tamten as he approached their home with rapid steps. And yet it was true. With this difference only, that the doctor was repeating the name with joyous unconcern, and sometimes with a shade of malice: "Rebecca, Rebecca!" and that he was whistling light-heartedly besides. He approached the house with long, brisk strides. Joyful and perfumed, he seemed to glide over the pavement.

Surgeon Tamten's black head was ruffled by the burning wind that played with his open blue jacket. The sinking sun took on a sombre gleam in surgeon

Tamten's polished shoes, and set a large drop of blood on the pearl in his tie. Surgeon Tamten carried his hat and stick under his arm and, in his back pocket, a Browning that was always loaded. He made his way along, skipping oddly as if he were dancing, like a cat stretching and arching its back. He had fine, golden eyes, and whenever he cast a flattering look at a woman as he passed, he seemed to throw her handfuls of blooming dandelions. He was singing a negro song to which he fitted these words: "Rebecca, oh Rebecca, dear, what luck's in store for us two here?"

He was walking past the café. Suddenly, he swerved, and as he went in left the doors wide open behind him: the gale banged them to at once with a noise like a gun. The surgeon's conscience was obviously very uneasy, for at this violent but harmless thunder-clap, he mechanically thrust his hand into his revolver pocket. But after a moment he regained his self-possession. The light-hearted waiter gave him a foolish smile and came up to him with the familiarity of an old acquaintance. The surgeon favoured him with a glance from his fine, golden eyes.

"Brandy and soda," he said, and suddenly broke off, dumbfounded.

In the middle of the terrace, in the narrow lane between the tables, a wretched little man was on his knees, picking up broken glass from the lilac carpet. Pierre, the head waiter, was leaning over him with a cold, malevolent smile.

"I give you my word once again, sir, it wasn't me who broke it," Dr. Tamten heard the old man excusing himself. "I didn't do it, but in kindness I'll help you pick it up."

"Be off, you'd better be off!" growled the waiter,

and obviously exasperated, ended by grabbing the old man's elbow and lifting him to his feet by main force.

It was then the surgeon recognised Gold the tailor.

"What are you doing here?" he asked.

The gale swept the terrace, setting the café signs squeaking and groaning mournfully. The waiter brought surgeon Tamten brandy and soda; the surgeon drank half the siphon at once, and again asked:

"What are you doing here?"

But the white-coated waiter was standing between him and the tailor.

"It's not you I'm asking," the surgeon lifted his hand, "where's that tailor gone?"

It was, however, the same waiter who replied, bland and indulgent:

"Are you referring to the tailor, sir?" and there was a note of scandalised politeness in his voice.

"The tailor broke a glass and can't pay for it."

The surgeon pressed the handle of the siphon and the soda rushed out with a hiss. The surgeon stared at the golden bottle of brandy with a satisfied, blissful air, then he glanced through the window at the street, fading away in the light of the setting sun, and recalled his favourite song again: "Rebecca, oh Rebecca, dear, what luck's in store for us two here?"

At the next table was a man on whom the surgeon had to operate for appendicitis. The man was evidently dying of heat and thirst: he kept swallowing glasses of soda-water and devouring grapes. The surgeon gave him a wink, shook a jocular finger at him, and repeated three times over: "Pips, pips, look out for the pips."

Everything was for the best, and nobody would so much as suppose that surgeon Tamten was disturbed and

full of the darkest forebodings. Even at the moment when Gold the tailor had given him such a stupid fright, nothing about him had betrayed the true state of his mind. He only sat up straight and, as the tailor took to his heels, threw him a furtive glance from eyes as amber as the brandy.

The surgeon drank the third glass. His powerful head was already humming with tenderness; at the bottom of every following glass lay a naked, beloved woman. They were all alike; they had black hair and dark, Byzantine features. And to every one of them the surgeon gave the same name. Then he felt that time was pressing, that he had to go, and with a brusque movement he caught up his hat and stick from the next chair. This movement must have alarmed somebody, for at that moment something like a dark shadow or a bat slipped by him with an unpleasant rustle. The surgeon turned hastily round.

"Ah, it's you? What are you doing here?" he asked Gold the tailor.

The old man stood rooted to the spot as if caught red-handed. After a moment he whispered:

"My compliments, doctor."

From the hospital, the surgeon was well acquainted with the tailor's way of expressing himself. He began to laugh:

"You're a plucky chap, you're keeping well. And how are the ribs?"

At once, the doctor's professional mind called up the picture of an operating theatre in the middle of which Gold, anæsthetised, was stretched out on a table. Rescction. Three lower ribs. Drainage tubes. Operative shock, hundred and four degrees. Otherwise normal course. In the surgeon's mind arose these words:

“Operation, operation!” It was the second thing he loved in the world. Brandy, the beloved woman and medicine had made him slightly maudlin, and he gazed almost tenderly at the bowed old man whose life he had saved. The tailor was standing quite near him.

His shaking head was sunk on his breast, his sparse, ruffled hair waved like the down of some strange bird. He could hardly breathe, and yet a sour, heavy mustiness kept coming in gusts from his mouth. This cold and foetid breath awoke pleasant recollections for the surgeon. He sniffed, could not place it, stared at the tailor with an absent look and, with a touch of emotion, said to himself in astonishment: “What’s that?” The repulsive corpse smell suddenly recalled the forgotten days of his youth. He sniffed again and exclaimed, radiant and moved: “Dissecting room!”

He forgot the tailor’s existence. The man on whom he had to operate for appendicitis looked at them, raising his eyebrows higher and higher. It was very hot. The air was suffocating and made everyone sweat. With an absent-minded movement, the surgeon pulled out his handkerchief and wiped his neck. As always, his gesture was strong and abrupt. The surgeon was radiant and sad at the same time; he was thinking about his far-off student days. Suddenly, something passed in front of his face again, and somebody exclaimed: “Shame!” At that, Tamten came to himself, forgot his dreams and, bewildered to the last degree, asked drily:

“What’s the matter?”

The tailor, who had been stationed by his table the whole time, took a step back, lifted his hand as if he wanted to ward off a blow, and groaned once more. Despair was reflected in his tear-filled eyes. He fell back a step, then threaded his way between the tables and

darted towards the door. It was unexpected and unpleasant beyond words.

The surgeon sat up and, as the tailor fled, threw him a furtive glance from eyes as amber as the brandy. He seemed to find the whole business amusing, but nobody knew that he was thinking gloomily: "It certainly appears as if one or other of us had a guilty conscience." But then he said to himself: "Rebecca!" and life took on meaning again and his fanciful terrors vanished at once. He put his hat and stick under his arm. The curve of the beloved shoulders became all in all for him. Exactly as for the old husband.

Widmar was gazing at this line as he stood behind his wife in the window recess. He breathed in the familiar perfume of her body and in the half light looked at her neck which, in its unreal beauty, grew tragic for him. He was panting. His heart leaped in his breast again. The blood pulsed in his temples and ears as loudly as if someone had drummed on a window, or walked on a wooden sidewalk with a rapid, echoing step.

That is just what it was. It was surgeon Tamten, skipping and dancing on his way to their house. He was tapping out a joyful negro song with his feet. When he stopped in front of the house, he noticed the pair at the window and waved his hand. He brandished his stick as well, like a little surgical hammer. The young woman gazed at him coldly and did not move from the spot. Old Widmar smiled pleasantly; he went to meet him and opened the door himself. Surgeon Tamten exchanged a friendly greeting with him, and Widmar studied his tawny eyes sadly.

"How's your heart?"

"Ah! Better not talk about it at all." And Widmar ushered in his guest.

Citron yellow clouds were moving over the town and a strange, blood-red mist rose in the west. Wild storm racks came rushing up from the burning south, chasing each other and merging in a lurid swirl above the town. Then they scattered, rolling across the sky like hazy balls, and vanished towards the west in reddish vapours.

In Batory Street there were larches and plane-trees growing by the great statesman's statue. The wind was whistling through the leaves, breaking the dry branches and shaking the tree-tops. Impetuous and brutal, it tore off the policeman's cap and carried it away like an enormous blue leaf. The policeman ran after his cap, caught it at last by a fence and put it back on his head, securing it with the chin-strap.

Driven by the wind, the sombre, troubled clouds were flying quicker and quicker over the town.

Surgeon Tamten possessed the ability, in certain circumstances and at certain moments of his existence, of studying himself as he would a patient on whom he had to operate. He would then examine his actions with a professional indifference.

That evening, as he was returning by cab about eleven o'clock, he went through his visit to the Widmars with the same precision as if he were recording a consultation.

"I entered the yellow drawing-room and noticed that Rebecca was standing motionless in the window-frame. I had the impression she didn't notice me. I was even ready to believe that she hadn't seen me when I waved to her from the street."

Surgeon Tamten leant back thoughtfully against his seat in its white cover. The evening was dark and close, the cab-horse went stumbling along, and the wind blew in the surgeon's face. "Rebecca stood by the window.

Looking at her from nearby, I came to the conclusion for the hundredth time that she isn't pretty, that she's almost ugly, and that she doesn't look young. She has little wrinkles under her dark grey eyes and round her lips, with their strange, half-moon shape. Her eyes are too close together, which gives her features an expression of dull concentration, almost of lasciviousness. On the other hand, her complexion is dark, as in old pictures, but just then it seemed to me simply dirty. I was absolutely amazed, although, to a certain extent, I'm already accustomed to such transformations in her. I felt indifference and dislike. I knew for sure I don't love this woman at all."

In this way, the surgeon made a mental note of her every feature and of his every impression, in the greatest detail. He was convinced of the correctness of his observations, and this certainty was more bitter to him than anything. He concluded: "She's an ugly, old woman," and in the self-same moment he was forced to affirm the exact opposite: "She's the most charming woman I know and I'm madly in love with her!"

He gazed in front of him and could see only the darkness and the driver's black shoulders. He spat to one side and tried to stop thinking. His eyes were luminous and shone in the dark like those of a cat. According to his own diagnosis, he was ill, seriously ill, and perhaps incurable, because this love was undeniably an illness. He told himself cynically that the only remedy would be an anti-love vaccine. And so he began imagining other women, but all of them again had the same Byzantine features and all were alike. Discouraged and disgusted with this idea, he sighed: "Rebecca . . ."

He had sighed like this some hours before, as he sat on a couch with her and Widmar. Dusk was falling.

Suddenly, Widmar began :

" Today I met a man in a blue jacket and flannel trousers. I thought it was you, doctor."

The surgeon replied :

" There are lots of men who wear the same kind of clothes."

" Of course."

Widmar coughed slightly. And then, without rhyme or reason, he asked this question : " Don't you think, doctor, that medical ethics differ considerably from the accepted opinions on morality ? "

The surgeon felt hot :

" Differ from generally accepted ethics ? " he repeated.
" I don't think so."

" And I'm quite convinced of it," continued Widmar.
" The doctor's always telling the patients lies. It must become a habit with him, even in private life."

" Which means ? " The surgeon snapped the question.

The room was growing shadowy. The face of the young woman sitting between them was like an ikon. Widmar was leaning forward, tortured by the suspicion that the other was at this moment, perhaps, caressing her. Bent forward, he trembled with joy and was re-assured because he felt his wife's hand on his knee. He sent up a despairing cry within, like a man whose soul is drowning in delight : " My dearest one ! " The hand kept stroking his knee, and all his worries and sorrows vanished on the spot. " Such a hand cannot lie ! " he thought with unreasonable logic.

" Something passed between them at a certain moment," surgeon Tamten said to himself later, lounging in his cab.

" Drive more carefully ! " he shouted to the cabby.

It was dark, and a car came out from a street corner ; the horse stumbled, the headlights flooded the doctor for a moment with a dazzling brilliance, and he was within a hair's breadth of falling out of the cab.

" Look out ! " he shouted.

" What ? " bawled the driver, trying to hear through the storm.

" It seems to me at times that her husband can read my mind ; perhaps that rouses the feeling of guilt and undeserved shame in me," thought the surgeon as he continued his self-analysis, though he had already had enough of the whole business. " While the three of us were sitting there in silence, at the moment when my knee felt that caress, he suddenly attacked me with this question on the subject of ethics, as if he could see in darkness as well as in daylight. It was alarming, and I was ready for anything ; I even wanted to confess everything to him. Fortunately, this unhealthy tension didn't last long, and nothing happened. Only I felt something had made Widmar infinitely happy. I even guessed he was smiling like a man who is really happy, so that his beard quivered as he smiled. Beyond all doubt, something passed between them at this moment. She turned her face towards him for a second and he leant forward. Then he stood up abruptly and my knee felt nothing more. Widmar put on the light and came up to us. His face was changed, transformed."

That was correct and the surgeon was not mistaken. One touch of this warm and supple hand had been enough, and Widmar was reborn, for the moment at least. " Rebecca," he thought, " why do you torture me like this ? " He felt the weight of his years and the abyss of the difference in their ages. " All because I'm too old, perhaps ? " But then, why should young women

be so mad about him, blondes and brunettes, plain and pretty ones ?

The golden lamps lit up the corners of the drawing-room. Widmar politely offered the surgeon a cigarette. The latter did not smoke and shook his head in refusal. Then old Widmar, happy and content, went on :

“ But I realised at once it wasn't you.”

“ How's that ? ” asked the surgeon worriedly.

“ I realised that this man in the blue jacket and flannel trousers wasn't you,” Widmar repeated, almost affectionately. It seemed as if he wanted to give his guest the greatest pleasure by this statement.

The men's conversation went on, polite and banal. The young woman kept silent the whole time. Nobody would even have noticed her presence had not the eroticism emanating from her recalled her existence. This eroticism flooded through the room, sweetish, cloying, soothing, and it was impossible to resist it. “ Exactly like chloroform,” thought the surgeon, anaesthetised and somnolent.

Widmar again offered his guest a cigarette, and the latter repeated cautiously that he never smoked. Widmar apologised and shut his case with a snap. He had the mild look of a forgiving prophet, his aquiline nose was really handsome. The surgeon looked him in the eyes frankly and kindly. Widmar stroked his beard gently and the surgeon caressed the cold steel of the Browning in his pocket. Then the husband kissed his wife on the forehead, excused himself and went out.

“ Please forgive me,” he said, “ but I'm very busy and still have a lot of work to do tonight.”

He stopped for a moment behind the door and sighed. “ Haven't I done something stupid ? ” At once, an army of repugnant men began to file through his brain,

almost in battle order. *Kyrie eleison! Christe eleison!* Captain of the first squadron of light infantry, Andrew Rozjemczy; a pugnacious lancer, that puppy Lieutenant Adam; doctor of laws and illegality, Kroczynski, and so many others, and right at the end, the Medical Superintendent of All Saints' Hospital, surgeon Tamten... *Christe eleison!*

Old Widmar told himself that the list of these names could go on indefinitely, because there were no limits to feminine shamelessness.

His wife and the surgeon were left alone together. She remained silent, as before, and this wordlessness had a more exciting effect on him than all the perverse caresses he knew. Besides, the surgeon was under the impression she had said something, but this was while her husband was still there. She had brought out something utterly stupid, which had no sense whatever, one of those hopelessly banal paradoxes in which she delighted and beyond which her intelligence could not aspire. She had said something of this kind: "The hundred per cent man possesses the lowest percentage of virility", or "a woman only gives herself to someone she doesn't love." This was most awkward and the surgeon looked at Widmar with an embarrassment obviously shared by the other.

"Anyway, I'm not interested," declared the surgeon, holding his hat on. His eyes were filled with dust: the moon was quivering in the yellow, forbidding sky. Dr. Tamten rubbed his eyes and growled:

"What an infernal wind"

"But when Widmar snapped his cigarette-case and gave me a sideways look, I felt something unpleasant might happen, and in self-protection put my hand in my pocket. As to women's brains, I'm not in the least

concerned ; I think a woman has more interesting organs."

In this way he went on with his musings, sensual, licentious, and what is worse, a little affected and insincere in the face of his idols. As he stopped in front of the hospital gate, a young house-surgeon rushed to meet him, the sides of his white gown blowing up in the wind. Surgeon Tamten tried to ignore his assistant and hurriedly pursued his thoughts still further, before anyone could hinder him. " I knew perfectly well that this man would strangle me with his hands, in spite of the sincere understanding we undeniably feel for each other."

The surgeon still wanted to recall something, something which seemed to him important and which should not be delayed, but he had not time enough. The assistant had jumped on to the cab. His gown was stained, and stank of iodoform.

" Sir," he said, " Number twenty-seven's temperature is a hundred with symptoms of peritonitis."

Surgeon Tamten sighed and uttered a few words in a whisper. The assistant could not make out whether they were excuses, or whether he was casting the filthiest obscenities in somebody's teeth. But the surgeon had already sprung quickly out of the cab, alert, as if his spine were made of rubber. Flying with the gait of a dancer, he mounted the steps at the main entrance, humming softly : " Rebecca, oh Rebecca, dear, what luck's in store for us two here ? " The assistant followed him saying :

" A week of a wind like this will pack all the patients off to the next world for you."

Without thinking, or attaching any importance to his words, the surgeon replied :

“Quite, quite ! It may even kill off people who are well ! ”

And when, just a week after, he recalled this senseless remark, his thoughts took a mystic turn, and he was forced to the conclusion that observations made during certain mental states have a prophetic significance.

Surgeon Tamten shut the door behind him and took a last look through the window at the yellow moon, shivering as in a fever.

The assistant was already offering the surgeon his gown. Dr. Tamten kept whistling a gay negro song. They were wheeling number twenty-seven along the passage. A sister was washing herself and scrubbing her hands.

In his yard, the unhappy tailor, Abraham Gold, was staring at this same yellow moon that kept on appearing and disappearing. The tailor had gone home directly after his strange adventure in the café. He had burst out, or rather flown out like a startled bird, and the wind had seized him, driving him along the streets all the while. The tailor turned up his threadbare coat-collar, panic-stricken about catching cold, “like a workman in a factory.” “Here and there you’re warm, and here and there you’re in draughts,” he said by way of comparison ; “it’s easy to catch cold, and it takes a rascal to get over it.”

These thoughts came to him mechanically, making no impression on him. In the same mechanical way he kept saying :

“Tt, tt, tt ! What a scandal ! ”

Worried and depressed, he went into the tiny yard, saw the children sitting in the doorway and said to them :

"Angela and Boruch, in a wind like this you must stay indoors ; your little lungs might burst, and then all the blood comes pouring out of your throat."

At this, Boruch, from the height of his nine years, thought to himself : " How silly you are ! I'd just love my blood to come pouring out of my throat, to see what it looks like. You don't know what's interesting a bit." But little Angela began to cry.

"Daddy, he's been hitting me all the time you were gone."

"Why did you hit her ?" wailed the tailor. "I'll pull your ears for you."

Little Angela gazed with interest at this scene, not knowing herself why she lied, but lying always afforded her great pleasure.

In the little yard there grew an ash-tree with clusters of crimson berries swinging from the branches. The variegated leaves were eddying above the porch in a many-coloured cloud.

"Go in, children !" said the tailor, hustling them along.

The place smelt of mustiness and moth-balls. In one room were a little stove, a table and two beds ; the other room was the tailor's workshop, its walls embellished with little pictures from fashion papers, portraying young dandies. In one corner stood a black tailor's model, on the table lay a cut-out pair of trousers, and on two chair-backs, an ironing-board and a large iron.

"Isn't uncle Isaac back from the power-station yet ?" asked the tailor.

"No," answered Boruch.

"Yes," lied Angela.

"Which of you's lying ?" asked the tailor, tired and scared as ever.

"Me!" answered Boruch, and his little sister looked at him, quite amused. The red-headed youngster always seemed a bit crazy to her. He had an innate horror of lying, but he would gladly lie if he could help someone by so doing. He liked to see somebody do a nasty trick, as well, so that he could save him by his own self-sacrifice. He was really odd. Not long before, he had been given a big rocking-horse by some rich lady, but he could not play with it as he turned giddy and fell off the horse. After such tumbles, it was a long time before he came to himself; he would lie stretched out in the middle of the little yard, howling and twitching. In consequence, he used to forget the multiplication table. His father would shout: "What are seven times eight?" Boruch would answer quite openly that he didn't know, while his eyes took on an alarming and appalling squint.

He carried this unfortunate rocking-horse he couldn't ride out into the street, and offered it to all the children he knew. It was early morning on a Sunday or holiday; there were crows perching in the yellow, autumn trees; the pavement in front of the house was carpeted with dry leaves. The red-headed urchin, stuttering unintelligible and tragic words, brought the horse outside the gate. The startled crows flew up, croaking, from the branches. Little Boruch lifted his bumpy red head and gazed at the blue sky sparkling with sunlight. Then he shouted down the street at the top of his voice: "Who'd like my horse?" and deposited it in the middle of the pavement. Then little Angela, black and grubby as a sweep, came rushing out of the yard, yelling reproachfully, "Boruch, stupid, a horse like that costs a lot! You could get a hundred dollars and a yard of cheviot tweed for that horse!" Little boys and girls came running up from nearby houses, making fun of Boruch and his horse; then two youngsters who were a bit older clambered on

to the horse, which see-sawed wildly on its rockers and suddenly collapsed beneath them.

The crows flew above the children, and the blue sky Boruch was gazing at seemed dark and ice-cold as a well. Angela ran up to a passer-by, an oldish man. He exclaimed in amazement: "Why are you so filthy?"

"The sweep threw me up the chimney!" lied Angela in despair. Meanwhile, the children were pulling the hair out of the horse's tail, and the boys were shouting: "Gee up!" while, in their midst, Boruch's red head looked like a carrot someone had thrown out on the dust-heap. Then it was suggested that they should arrange the horse's funeral. . . . But that's of no importance.

Abraham Gold the tailor lit the fire, peeled the potatoes and washed the saucepan.

"I never can make out which of you is lying," he said.

The stove was smoking. The tailor's eyes were watering, and he kept on coughing and wiping his nose. Boruch went up to him, examined him closely and announced in a matter of fact tone:

"Daddy's crying again."

The little tailor stooped down, all huddled up. He said nothing. Boruch, from the height of his nine years, brought out:

"All people who cry have a stove that smokes."

At these words, the tailor wagged his head in delight and whispered through his tears:

"Dear, dear, dear"

Suddenly, the door was opened so violently that the saucepan jumped on the stove and the glasses rang in the cupboard. The tailor's brother, the electrician Isaac Gold came in. Big and broad-shouldered in his blue overalls, he stood towering in the doorway.

"Good evening," he said. He had a hoarse, thick voice.

The tailor made no reply.

"Good evening," said the electrician again, and his words rang through the room to fly out of the open door into the street.

"I'm glad you're back," muttered the tailor, turning slowly round without getting up. Doubtless this seemed funny to Boruch, for he suddenly burst into a nervous laugh: "Ha, ha!"

The water hissed in the pot, the potatoes were boiling. The tailor took his brother Isaac by the arm, and led him into the next room. There, the tailor suddenly remembered Surgeon Tamten, then some mental association with the surgeon arose, and the tailor experienced a fresh alarm. His lower jaw began trembling. He was afraid of everything. Even the trousers spread out on the table stirred him to frantic terror. It seemed to him that these trousers were the legs of a man he knew who was going to jump off the table and start chasing him. At last, he grew a little calmer.

"Isaac," he breathed, "it's occurred to me again that it's you who are red-headed."

He lifted the lamp so that the light fell on his brother's face, studied these features, these freckles and this flaming hair. The eyes, too, were blue.

"And what then?" said the electrician. Then he added:

"I tell you, your wife never interested me. I never so much as looked at her."

"Well, well," murmured the tailor, confused, "and yet Boruch's very like you. Neither she nor I had red hair I'm very sorry"

The tailor sat down on a foot-stool, the lamp shaking in his hand. Behind the door, Boruch looked through a crack and said to his sister in a choking voice :

“ A dachshund, look, a dachshund”

He did not hear what the brothers were saying ; the wind howled behind the windows ; the two men were talking quickly and indistinctly, and the water was bubbling louder and louder in the pot. Uncle Isaac stood up and sighed :

“ We’ll have to think it over again. It’s all the same. Everyone makes his living as best he can ! ”

“ Can you hear ? ” said Angela. She was a sensible little woman, and everything, beginning with the pre-meditated lie, was already there in a latent state.

Isaac the electrician repeated as he left :

“ You have to get a living where you can, or you and your children will starve to death. I shan’t be able to help you at all if they give me the sack at the factory.”

“ Yes, yes, I know,” and the disgusting little man accompanied his brother to the door.

Then they ate their potatoes and herrings. Angela’s head soon fell on the table where her elbows were spread out.

“ A nice thing ! ” said the tailor. “ A big girl like that falling asleep at table.” He took her in his arms and carried her to bed. Boruch, you go to bed, too ! ”

And as the urchin was half asleep, the tailor woke him with a slight nudge. Anyhow, it was very late, nearly midnight.

Before this, the tailor had been working a long time. He had to turn a customer’s trousers, and the job was urgent, although he knew perfectly well that the customer

was not in the slightest need of these trousers. He got up once or twice and went to the window. He saw the dark yard through the window, a dark fence, and behind the fence a dark, two-storeyed house. Something was troubling him very much. At last he went out into the yard. The ash-tree was creaking mournfully. The moon kept appearing and disappearing. The tailor stayed in the doorway quite a while. Then he went back into the room; the trousers were spread out on the table like a man's legs. It was then he woke Boruch with a slight nudge.

"You'd like to be an engineer, Boruch?"

"Uh-uh?"

The tailor shook his head doubtfully with a wistful look in his eyes.

"And what are seven times eight? You don't know? Do try: perhaps you'll remember it."

But Boruch repeated, quite honestly, that he couldn't remember.

"A fine engineer you'll make! Huh!"

Yes, it wasn't easy to deceive oneself and run away from reality. It was about precisely this that the tailor was thinking when he stood in the middle of the yard, looking at the neighbouring house.

On the first storey, immediately above the fence, was a window, dark at the moment. But in the darkness the tailor guessed the outline of the light curtain which was, as always, closely drawn.

The ash-tree was groaning like a living thing, the clouds scudded across the sky, and there was the sound of wheels in the street. Tailor Gold looked at the moon, which winked as if joking with him. But the tailor heeded nothing, he only thought that his son would never be an engineer but stay an idiot all his life. Along the road

rattled the wheels of a cab whose horse stumbled and snorted. A car came round the corner, sounding its horn loudly, and the man leaned out of the cab, shouting :

“ Drive more carefully ! ”

Surgeon Tamten was in the cab, and the tailor heard him whistling a gay, negro song. The popular air reminded the tailor of the music in the café, the café reminded him of old Widmar and his affairs, and his thoughts once more revolved in a circle. With a fixed, hypnotised stare, he gazed at the window on the first floor of the neighbouring house, and leaning against the groaning ash-tree, he thought that such a simple window with a drawn curtain could be happiness for some and disaster for others.

That same night, the wind tore a shutter off Widmar's house and hurled it into the bushes. The other half was left hanging from a hinge, and began banging against the window-frame in a terrifying, distressing way, as if asking to be taken down and brought into the house. In the morning, infuriated by the noise, Widmar went out into the garden in his pyjamas and tore down the unlucky shutter and the hinge together.

It was dawn. Widmar had slept only two hours, and his sleep had been haunted by awful nightmares, but he preferred these nightmares to reality.

A lamp had been burning in Widmar's study all night. Spirals of tobacco smoke uncurled in the air. Seated at his desk Widmar had read Sophia Dubilanka's memoirs late into the night.

At first, as he knew that, three rooms away, his wife was still with the surgeon, the letters ran together in a red blot, and he couldn't make out a word. At one moment he wanted to get up and go back to the drawing-room, but with a tremendous effort of will-power, he gave up

the idea. "I won't go. I must read to the end, even if it costs me my life." The dead woman's diary was a vengeance from beyond the grave. It was not until the anniversary of her death that it had fallen into Widmar's hands, but it had decided his fate in a few hours. Here, briefly, is what happened :

After dinner, while Widmar was lying on the verandah, the street-bell rang, the concierge went out, and Widmar heard him ask : "Why are you ringing in the street ? If it's for Mr. Widmar, you mustn't use the entrance-gate but the back-door." A boy's voice answered : "I have to go through the garden to Mr. Widmar, the industrialist." "Through the garden ? Go round, I tell you !"

An argument followed, and the noise of violent scolding. Widmar stood up to go and see what was happening, but at that very instant an urchin ran up on to the verandah : "Are you the industrialist ?" Then he handed Widmar a small packet and added :

"They're anonymous papers for you, goodbye."

The boy disappeared as unexpectedly as he had come.

"What's the joke ?" Widmar asked himself. He opened the packet and turned suddenly purple. The veins in his neck swelled, his heart began to beat madly. "Oh !" he gasped, "oh !"

In the packet he had found an exercise book on which was written in a familiar hand :

"The Betrayal."

"What's the meaning of this ?" he said in a hoarse voice. He opened the book and understood. It was Sophia Dubilanka's diary. "What does she want with me now she's dead ?" he thought, although his weak heart had guessed the truth at once. Suspecting the worst, he began to read. At the beginning he found the account of his wedding, the way in which he had made

his wife's acquaintance, and the gossip that had run through the town about their love. Many things were completely beyond his comprehension. "Old wives' tittle-tattle," he grumbled; there were many despicable, sickening things. "This is sheer abuse!" he shouted. "How dare she write such things about my wife! Slander!"

The concierge appeared on the verandah steps. "Did you call me, sir?"

Widmar dealt the table a violent blow with his fist. He was black with rage. "I did call! I shouted: 'Slander!'", he bellowed over the garden, "slander and away with it!" He wanted to destroy the diary at once. He felt no respect for the dead woman's memory. "Vulgar fish-wife!" he howled through the house, "fish-wife" Suddenly, his noble indignation was transformed into an ancient and very well-known emotion.

It was jealousy of the first quality: clinging, cunning and explosive, it had at the same time a hidden sweetness to which he always succumbed. He glanced behind him: there was nobody on the verandah. The wind was rising, the autumn bushes in the garden were withering. He started running through the leaves of the diary in feverish haste. If she had written it, it could not be without some foundation! He went on running through the pages, and suddenly found one page very nearly filled with names.

It was terrible! "Impossible!" he cried. He lifted his hand to his heart, his left side palpitated, he thought for a moment he was going to die. "Impossible!" He read the long list of names up and down. "The whole litany!" he howled. The list began with the lancer Adam. What an obscene name! Then, Captain Rozjemczy, then the major, etc., etc. "Prostitute, common prostitute," he kept on saying. Tears stood in his eyes.

He should have been prepared for it, anyhow, he ought to pay for his own carelessness. Two years before, when he still hardly knew her, he had been warned against this woman. He would not listen to anything at that time, and would have to put up with the consequences.

"Prostitute," he growled, brandishing his fist. His head turned, the flaming bushes in the garden danced before his eyes.

In a moment, however, he regained his balance somewhat. "Granted," he thought, "I have it from herself that she had a lover before me, she made no secret of it." He then recalled that, shortly after his marriage, he had heard some gossip about a lancer. He had gone rushing back to the house, torn with pain and passion.

"Rebecca," he had said, "I don't want to hear any more talk about your past!"

She had looked at him directly and tranquilly, and he had not been able to read anything in her eyes.

"Don't listen, then," she had answered.

"It's impossible not to listen when everyone round me is talking of nothing else, as if for sheer spite!"

"Pure imagination!"

"I won't have you talking to me in that tone!" he had exploded suddenly.

She stopped then. He looked at her in hatred almost.

"Who was this lancer?" he shouted brutally. No answer. "I'm asking you, who was this lancer?"

She laid her hand on his knee and some time later replied: "I've told you, though, I loved no-one but you, and that before you I lived with only one man."

He felt suddenly that she lied. "You're lying!" he wanted to shout, and then the whole scene would have

begun again, but he looked into her eyes and thought : " No, such eyes can't lie." Her gaze was limpid and straightforward, but empty within, as if the void were looking out of them. He thought then that, if she lifted her lids, it would be as if she opened doors giving on to dark rooms which, as he now knew, were filled with impalpable masculine shadows.

His generous instinct awoke within him again. He was, at bottom, a moral man, and tried not to accuse others of immorality. He decided to go to his wife, show her the diary and assure her that he didn't believe a word. He knocked at her door. There was no answer. " Perhaps she's in the drawing-room ? " but he could not find her there, either. He ran all over the house then, full of anxiety. At last he began running hither and thither, filling the house with his frantic calling. Insignificant facts concerning her conduct suddenly assumed a profound and hidden meaning, a monstrous importance, everything testified to her indubitable betrayal. " Where has she gone ? " he cried.

" Where does she go at the same time every day ? And what's the meaning of this intimacy with the doctor ? "

He came to a decision, and left the house, furious and depressed. He sat down on a bench in the park. It was quite deserted ; the wind swept the pathways. Quite crushed by the avalanche of revelations, the longer Widmar lingered over certain facts, the more amazed he grew at his own blindness. First of all, these secret disappearances from home. Secondly, these solitary walks. Lastly, this surgeon. And then what the devil was it the tailor had talked about ? He had come to take the measurements for some clothes, he had stayed in the entrance-hall less than a quarter of an hour, but

he had managed to leave behind him a stigma of disgust and of obscure allusions. What was he talking about ?

Suddenly, he saw the tailor coming towards him, and thought, " It's the hand of God ! " The tailor was making for the fountain. Widmar called to him : " Come here ! " He clutched him by the sleeve and dragged him along to the café. But he did not open the decisive conversation, for the tailor began to be evasive. Widmar said : " I don't know, perhaps you haven't a wife and don't know what suffering is. " He felt at once he'd said something foolish and exclaimed furiously : " There's no suffering ! All I want is the truth ! The truth ! " He was ready for every meanness as long as he could learn this truth.

It was because, in addition to the list of real or assumed lovers, in addition to old affairs which he could, at bottom, have forgiven his wife, he had read in the diary monstrous allegations concerning her present life. Sophia Dubilanka wrote :

" I learned in the hospital that this woman had recently undergone an operation. At first, appendicitis was mentioned, then it was said that certain feminine complications had arisen . . . But the story goes that it was really something completely different . . . If it is true and if Widmar knows nothing about it, that means she has already betrayed him, since she became his wife. I counted on my fingers. "

When, that evening, Widmar recalled this passage, he drew out his cigarette-case, and without rhyme or reason, asked surgeon Tamten : " Don't you think doctor, that medical ethics are quite different from the generally accepted opinions on morality ? " He noted with satisfaction that the surgeon was clearly caught by his question. However, he had not observed if his wife

reacted to it, because at this moment she touched his knee and he forgot everything on the spot. He now reflected that this caress might have been simply calculated. He had left them together then, calmer and a little more at ease. "Let come what may!" He had hurried to his study to finish reading the diary.

In his desk he found a letter written to him by his wife, about a year ago, just before her operation. The letter was full of tenderness and of those stupid paradoxes to which he could not resign himself, even in the moments when love made him most uxorious. Beyond that, the letter contained very few facts.

" . . . I was examined by surgeon Tamten. He is said to be brilliant but like all brilliant men he doesn't look like it. He said I had a slight attack of appendicitis and that an operation was not necessary for the time being. Therefore please don't come and don't worry. When you return after your affairs are settled we can fix the date of an eventual operation. Don't be afraid of it, the devil won't take me anyway . . . "

Widmar was trying, now, to recall exactly in what circumstances this had taken place. He had gone away for two months to the capital. He had left his wife in good health, but, as he now recollected, slightly changed or uneasy. After six or seven weeks he received the alarming news that she was taken ill. He at once broke off negotiations with his partners and wired that he was returning. But she would not let him come back, and stopped him by telegram, after which she sent him this letter. "You must finish your business, I want you to!"

He recalled that he was surprised and moved by this solicitude about his business, which was something new with her. He did not assume then that it might have to do with something else. She simply wanted him to stay

in the capital as long as possible. Circumstances, at that time obscure, today became clear and everything was explicable from this point of view. It was evident it was tremendously important to her that her husband should not return until after the operation. And if that were so, it meant Sophia Dubilanka's assumptions were right.

He felt himself ready to forgive his wife the whole of her past as long as he could be assured that it was not true, that this gossip was without foundation and that since they had been living together she had not betrayed him. He was yearning. The physical memory of the light caress bestowed this very evening on the sofa moved him in spite of himself. But he put an end to this tenderness, ridiculous in his present situation. To give himself strength, he opened the page of the diary where Sophia Dubilanka had enumerated in detail the scandalous stories she had collected. He shuddered with disgust. "No, it's all over. I will learn the truth whatever it is." He thought with satisfaction of his plans concerning the tailor. "Oh, he's going to be useful. Ha, ha! The window, he said?! The window?!"

The light in the bulb turned red and grew dim, they were probably changing the current at the power station, the cloud of cigarette smoke uncoiling in the study turned lilac. There was a knock at the door.

"Who's there?" asked Widmar, and again he felt the violent contraction of his cursed weak heart. "It's an attack," he said to himself.

They changed the current at the power station, the bulb grew bright, the tobacco smoke turned golden. The knocking at the door went on. Widmar opened it, and crammed the diary into his side pocket. His wife came in.

"Don't come in, don't come in!" he shouted.

His hand tightened on his heart and on the diary at the same time.

"I don't feel well," he groaned, "but don't take any notice of it."

He was nearly fainting, gazed at his wife with starting eyes and wondered where the devil her charm had gone. Really, for a second, she seemed to him almost ugly; however, this coincided with another attack of giddiness and he did not trust his eyes. Perhaps he was right, for a moment later his wife was strikingly beautiful.

He swayed again, but he had already lost his balance and collapsed on a chair standing against the wall. "An attack, an attack," went flashing through his mind. He at once recognised the terror of death that accompanied the attack! "God be with you," he wanted to call to his wife, "I forgive you everything!" but he could no longer utter a sound. There was a rattling in his throat, his breathing was irregular and whistling. Widmar fainted, but before his wife had time to rush to him he came to. "I forgive you nothing!" he thought. He sat there, his eyes still starting, his face distorted, but he breathed more easily.

"All that because of this wind," he groaned.

He was absolutely bent on spending the night in his study. At the mere thought of his wife's room, a cold shiver ran through him And yet he knew she had only to lift a finger for him to go grovelling to her on all fours like a dog "*Kyrie eleison!*" he said "*Christe eleison!*" Through the power of his marvellous litany, he tried to defend himself against the spells of the evil spirit. But when he shut the study door after his wife, he nearly gnashed his teeth with fury: why hadn't she moved a finger? He gave up controlling himself, that game tried his nerves too much. The only thing that

saved him and preserved his strength was the return of his baseness, which swept through him again like refreshing waves, washing away all his uncertainty. He rubbed his hands and sniggered: "Yes, yes, I'll play the game to the end, I must keep myself in hand."

His hand still shaking, he poured ten drops of digitalis into a glass and swallowed them. He put on a pair of orange pyjamas with scarlet lapels and pockets, covered himself with a rug and tried to sleep. The shutter swung backwards and forwards behind the window, there was a howling like animals in the chimney and Widmar turned from one side to the other with no result. He was afraid of the darkness and did not put out his lamp all night. He stared in front of him, his eyes tired from the smoke. He was considering various possibilities. Among other things he decided that the very next morning and without delay, he would make a certain important visit that would clear up a good many things for him. "Why didn't that occur to me much sooner? I could have settled the thing this very day."

This decision calmed Widmar a little and he sank into a short, uneasy sleep. This sleep lasted only two hours and was full of nightmares which, from this moment, were to haunt him every day. He dreamt, among other things, that in the morning, as in the old days, Sophia Dubilanka came into his study, took down a gun from the wall and fired it at him. "This is what you deserve," she said. He rushed at her at once and tore the weapon from the desperate woman's hands. Suddenly the shot was fired and Widmar woke at the din of the explosion. It was the shutter banging against the window. He could not bear this noise. He went out across the verandah into the garden, tore down the shutter hanging from a solitary hinge, and hurled it into the bushes. A ridiculous bird

was twittering gaily, dawn was breaking and Widmar thought : " I'm glad I've taken this decision, in three hours I can go and see him."

At nine o'clock, he slipped out of his house and was driven to All Saints' Hospital.

Surgeon Tamten, too, slept badly that night. He had been wakened twice for number twenty-seven, at three o'clock he had removed a drainage tube from a patient's stomach and changed the dressing. At the end of an hour, he was awakened again, as they were bringing a porter with hernia from the station.

However, the surgeon got up as brisk as every morning. He took a cold shower, the water was scented and bluish, and he enjoyed splashing himself. From behind the radiator a black cat sprang out, arching her back and purring. The surgeon, in a yellow silk shirt, strolled from room to room, knotting his tie and purring too. The old housekeeper came into the dining-room, and without knowing why, the surgeon called her " my little aunt." She was bringing in the breakfast. The surgeon sang the first words of a popular song jokingly :

" When I see my little aunt"

The housekeeper poured out the coffee and answered :
" Only mind you don't catch cold, doctor."

The silk-shirted doctor went on strolling about the rooms, looked at himself in the mirrors and knotted his tie. There were four rooms. Vast and dark, with blue and lilac carpets, they faced north. The black cat followed the doctor, purring. " Puss, puss, puss," said Tamten, scratching her behind the ear. They looked at one another like old friends. The cat and the surgeon both had yellow eyes, as handsome as each other's and even alike. The surgeon swallowed his coffee at a gulp,

gave the cat a drink in the saucer, and only then put on his white linen trousers and a clean surgeon's coat. His private life stopped. He opened the dark oak door that gave on to the corridor, crossed the sisters' refectory, and ran quickly down the stairs to his surgery in the right wing of the hospital.

On the ground floor, the patients were strolling about the corridors in dressing-gowns. One of the patients had crutches and a bandaged foot. The surgeon slipped by, a fixed smile on his face, saying good morning to right and left, and went rushing on. He simply bowled along the corridors, brisk and alert. The coat fluttered gaily. The patient on crutches limped after the surgeon, catching him up by the X-ray laboratory, just as the sister came out. The patient asked nervously :

" Doctor, is it true it's not getting worse ? Why is there water on the knee ? "

The surgeon tapped him on the shoulder with the same fixed smile as he said :

" A trifle. A trifle. Nothing's worse. Everything's fine." And he disappeared behind the door.

The young house-surgeon, Rubinski, was waiting for him in the surgery. The surgeon threw at him in passing :

" Probably have to amputate that poor chap's leg."

The assistant bowed, earnest and attentive. The surgeon examined three new case sheets, and entered the surgical dressing room.

" Oh, doctor ! " called the gynaecologist through the doorway, " Could you come here a moment ? Would you like to see an interesting case of carcinoma uteri ? "

Surgeon Tamten examined the woman suffering from cancer and returned to the surgical dressing-room. The senior house-physician, Boguski, was performing a

puncture: the patient was seated on the table while the house-doctor introduced the needle between the ribs under the scapula.

"Please, doctor, please carry on," said surgeon Tamten. Then, when the patient had been led away, they greeted each other. "I had a hard time on duty last night," the surgeon went on. "Anything new?"

The senior house-physician mumbled that a car had run over somebody again. These cars, a real plague, worse than tuberculosis.

"The patient's here, with a dislocated elbow, doctor," he said.

A hospital attendant ran out into the corridor shouting: "Who's come about his arm?" A little old man came in. He had a jacket thrown over one shoulder; the surgeon grasped him by the bad elbow, and the old chap uttered a thin, high-pitched cry: "a - a - a - h!" The surgeon, with the artificial smile on his face, said to him cheerfully: "A trifle. A trifle."

A nurse in a white cap came in. The surgeon did not notice her. He asked quickly:

"Have you had anything to eat today? Some tea? Good. We'll give him ether."

The patient was anæsthetised. The nurse came in again. The surgeon looked at her cap with an air of displeasure: "What's the matter? Has somebody come?" He was reducing the dislocation. The patient groaned deeply under the anæsthetic. As the surgeon was washing his hands afterwards, the nurse came in for the third time:

'A gentleman would like to see you, sir.'

'I'm busy just now,' and he went on washing his hands.

The young assistant, Rubinski, came up :

" A gentleman would like to see you, sir."

" I heard," growled the surgeon : Then he called to the attendant : " Get the plaster ready for the girl with the spinal ! And then, the X-ray room ! "

The old man was carried off on a stretcher. Dr. Tamten crossed from the dressing-room to the waiting-room ; Widmar got up from his bench and came towards him.

" Ah ! " said the surgeon, " it was you who were asking for me ? "

" Yes ! "

" Please come into my room."

Widmar wore a light brown suit with blue checks, he looked well and had a commanding air about him, but he was hardly seated in an arm-chair when he grew old all at once and his exhaustion became patent. He mastered his nervousness with obvious difficulty.

" Are you here as a patient ? " and the surgeon half closed his yellow eyes.

" Not quite. Rather as the husband of one of your patients."

Behind the door someone was groaning, a metallic object fell on the floor and there was a laugh : " What a wind ! What are you opening the window for ? "

The surgeon had placed his hands on the table and was moving his fingers up and down rhythmically. Although a seemingly long moment had passed, he replied in a flash :

" I'm listening."

This stupid refrain slipped through his mind, however : " Rebecca, oh Rebecca, dear, what luck's in store for us two here ? "

" Doctor," Widmar went on cautiously, " I owe you my wife's life."

The surgeon inclined his black, shaggy head :

" Oh !"

" So I should like to hear from you, doctor, what was the course of the operation."

It seemed to Widmar that the surgeon became gloomy, but in a trice his face cleared and the affected smile reappeared.

" The course ? Why, excellent, my dear sir ! "

Widmar arrested his look without any difficulty, it was smiling, yellow, feline. They stared each other in the eye without blinking. Widmar drew out his cigarette case and, looking straight into the surgeon's eyes, offered him an Egyptian cigarette.

The other declared pointedly :

" I'm sorry. I don't smoke."

" Oh, I beg your pardon"

Once more a groaning rose behind the door : " For God's sake, do shut the window ! " Then silence reigned.

" You'll understand my curiosity, doctor. I'm afraid the operation . . . h'm . . . might have consequences that would become evident only now That's my chief concern," lied Widmar precipitately.

" Medicine is not acquainted with such consequences," rejoined the surgeon with a frozen smile.

" I'm only a layman," affirmed Widmar with assumed humility. He was thinking at the same time : " How hard it is to play this comedy ! I must try, all the same, though I know he won't let himself be caught."

" But, I hear h'm . . . they do leave traces for some time"

The surgeon said nothing.

"Doctor, please, tell me under what conditions the operation was performed?" Widmar's voice shook slightly.

"Why, with the greatest pleasure," said the surgeon.

"It was appendicitis?"

"Of course. If we had put off the operation, even a day, I believe it would have been too late."

"Really? My wife told me that at first you advised her against an operation"

"I?" said the surgeon in amazement. It was very strange. "I don't understand any of this at all," he thought. Then he said:

"It's a year ago, and perhaps that's the reason why I can't quite recall this detail. But, I'm astonished."

"Oh, I beg your pardon, forgive me," Widmar interrupted with hypocritical politeness, "you may have misunderstood me You remember I was not in town at the time. I arrived when it was all over, ten days after the operation, when the wound was already quite insignificant, and the dressings were being changed every second day. My wife never gave me a detailed account of her illness. You have completely reassured me, but what about this appendicitis, as a matter of fact?"

The manner in which Widmar had hurled his question was quite obviously not to the surgeon's liking. "Is it meant for a threat?" But he ignored this unpleasant tone and addressed Widmar with the cold cheerfulness he usually exhibited towards his patients:

"Well, I've never hidden the fact from you, nor was there any reason to, that during the operation it was discovered incidentally that, in addition to appendicitis, your wife was suffering from certain feminine complaints"

"Such as?" cried Widmar.

"A tumour," replied the surgeon coldly. "It's a common enough complaint, and not serious, in any case But, to tell you the truth, I don't quite see why you should be interested in matters so long past."

"There's nothing surprising in that," rejoined Widmar, gloomily, and suddenly, with difficulty suppressing his anger, he asked breathlessly:

"Have you told me the truth?"

The surgeon sat up, outraged.

"What?"

"I'm afraid that medical ethics are very different from the ideas simple mortals hold on morality. Perhaps, in certain circumstances, the doctor hasn't the right to tell the truth? Perhaps he's even forbidden to tell the truth? Isn't it funny, doctor, that he shouldn't be allowed to tell the truth? Isn't it funny? Answer this question at least. It's as I say, isn't it?"

"Well, yes," the surgeon acquiesced with a bad grace, and almost contemptuously.

He stood by the window with his back to Widmar, fiddling about with his face. "Now what's he doing?" Widmar asked himself inquisitively.

"Is there anything else you want?" asked the surgeon, without leaving the window.

Widmar reached a paroxysm of anger and despair. To the devil with diplomacy! He stuttered:

"Doctor, I ask you once more, was there really nothing hidden behind this operation? I have the impression, and I tell you frankly, I even have certain information that makes me suspect you're hiding something."

"What information?"

"Ah! Your curiosity's roused at last," growled

Widmar ominously. And then, choked with jealousy, he cried :

“ Give me an answer, please ! I know we understand each other far better than it would seem. I’m at my wits’ end, and I’m speaking to you as man to man. The most elementary morality requires you to tell me the truth, whatever it may be. I demand it of you as, in certain vital circumstances, you understand, a man may demand it of a man ! Do you hear ? ”

The surgeon turned away from the window and threw out his arms.

“ I’m not a man,” he answered drily, “ I’m a doctor.”

Widmar said no more. He was sitting in an armchair, holding his lightly silvered black beard in his hand. Suddenly he noticed something peculiar. The surgeon’s face had become unrecognisable ; he did not understand what had produced this change, but it made him gasp with surprise. Instead of eyes, the surgeon had bleeding holes !

“ Ough ! ” breathed Widmar. “ God only knows what I thought it was ! They’re red glasses ! ”

The surgeon went on :

“ Excuse me if I can’t give you any more time, but I have to go to the X-ray laboratory. After that, I’m gladly at your service any time.”

He walked towards the door, but Widmar did not stir. “ Strange fellow,” said Tamten to himself, “ and yet he must be calmed down,” and in a few words he immediately reduced the whole of the preceding conversation to a not very understandable joke.

“ Now look ! These are trifles ! Trifles, I assure you ! ”

“ But what ? ” asked Widmar.

"All that's a trifle. I understand your alarm, your wife's health is concerned, but I can vouch she's now quite well, she's health itself! Whatever there was is past What is appendicitis or a tumour? My dear sir! There are days when I operate on ten such cases, but we do these operations in a twinkling There's absolutely nothing to fear Anyhow, if you want to, come and see us. A specialist can examine your wife, no matter when A trifle!"

At last Widmar stood up. "No, there's no way out, the comedy must be played to the end," he thought in disgust.

"I must ask you, please, to excuse my jumpiness, doctor, I had queer forebodings," and he put out his cigarette. He went out, breathing heavily, and the surgeon heard him greet Rubinski, the house-surgeon, in the waiting-room. "Oh, that's bad," worried the surgeon, "that's not good at all." He did not like the assistant and had no great confidence in him, while the thought that Rubinski had been present at Rebecca Widmar's operation afforded him no satisfaction at all.

The surgeon darted along the corridor again; the patients were sitting at the windows, Tamten glanced right and left with his frozen smile. The coat and the spectacles he wore to adjust his sight gave him the air of a motorist. Through these glasses everything looked to him as red as if it had been soaked in blood. He entered the darkened X-ray laboratory. He had no more time to think about his conversation with Widmar.

The door in the passage opened, and Widmar came out of the waiting-room with the assistant, Rubinski. Widmar was saying:

"Then we'll meet again today. I shall be most grateful to you."

It was plain they were finishing a conversation. Widmar did not leave the hospital at once. The patients saw him talking with the hospital attendant, Paul, in the courtyard.

"I've a good memory," was the attendant's reply to a question Widmar asked, "I can recollect nearly all the patients for the last five years"

Next, Widmar was seen crossing the hospital garden with the matron. With her, too, he held an animated conversation, and when he left the hospital some time later, he already had a fairly accurate idea about the operation in which he was so interested. He could more or less reconstruct, in imagination, the progress of the operation, and even counted on being able, that evening, to bring the whole truth to light. And yet he was in a highly nervous state. He walked along, profoundly agitated, gesticulating and talking to himself.

Widmar himself recounted later on that he had never been so agitated as on that day. He openly confided to Abraham Gold, the tailor, that the whole morning and afternoon he had had the impression that, instead of his heart, he was carrying in his breast an infernal machine which threatened to blow him up at any moment. "I was like someone possessed," he said, "because I hadn't slept all night and my heart kept beating terribly. Everything in my brain was confused, and the whole of human morality meant little enough to me, although I could have discoursed about it for several hours. If ever there were moments in my life when I was capable of a crime, then, that day, I was capable of things a thousand times worse, I mean the lowest villainy and the worst rottenness. But I say again, I was as if drunk."

"On the other hand," he explained objectively,

“ I behaved quite consciously and with due reflection, even, and at certain moments my thoughts were strangely clear. I remember, for instance, that the idea of the other gate came into my mind. It was a kind of clairvoyance, simply. Next to our villa is a house with a ruined doorway. And here was I picturing it to myself in a second, if not less. I was leaving the hospital just then. It's a curious thing, I saw this door, in imagination, just as it might look at night ; although I don't think I've ever looked at it at night, I distinctly saw a gloomy recess and part of the downpipe. And then it all flew out of my head until the evening and that cry.

“ In the depths of my heart I experienced a lively satisfaction, as if I had accomplished, not a despicable, but a good deed, or as if human and divine justice were satisfied. I trembled with joy. Passers-by didn't worry me at all, I went on gesticulating and talking to myself. Someone even noticed me. ‘ What's that loony up to ? ’ he exclaimed. Perhaps I'd bumped into him. I only know there were now no limits to my anger. ‘ Ah, so that's it ? ’ I kept saying, ‘ you're playing hide-and-seek ? You let me beg and pray you, and then it turns out that you're not a man at all, but a doctor.’ I thought about her hardly at all.”

This was certainly most strange : there had suddenly opened in Widmar's consciousness as it were a dark hole, into which, for some hours, any thought of his wife had fallen. He had collected interesting and important information about her and this illness, but he had done it mechanically, so to say, and rather for the empty satisfaction of getting the better of the obstinate surgeon. It was not until later, when he was alone with his wife in the evening, that he realised the error he had made, and also to what a degree he had been misled by this

psychical transposition of subjects, so cunning and surprising : instead of being angry with his wife, he was furious with Tamten. He now felt overwhelmed with shame with regard to the doctor. He had wronged a man who was not only not his enemy, but with whom, at bottom, he could have lived in perfect friendship. Unfortunately, it was rather too late.

" If only I could have a private talk with him for once, at least ! " exclaimed old Widmar. " We'd come to a mutual understanding in the end, wouldn't we ? "

" But," he went on, appealing to the tailor, " when I saw Tamten enter the café with his hat and stick under his arm, he seemed to me again to be the guilty one and the instigator of everything. I have no doubt that somebody else, a malicious being, was guiding my mind, endeavouring at any cost to dissipate my anger with my wife, and to make it fall on someone else."

" Now," he said, " we had hardly finished our second talk when you stood up, Gold, to join your brother, and said goodbye to me. I saw that, at the door, you found yourself face to face with the surgeon. Both of you looked surprised at this meeting, and stood there gaping at each other. And then the surgeon smiled, shrugged his shoulders, and with a joyful bound, reached the terrace. He even looked as if he might begin dancing between the tables. As for you, you vanished like lightning. I was rather annoyed with you, but I quietened down when I saw you'd stopped on the other side of the street, and were looking at me through the café window.

" The surgeon was sitting three tables away from me. They brought him a siphon and brandy ; then he caught sight of me and bowed. There was hardly anyone on the terrace except ourselves. At other times, during such heat and on such a windy afternoon, I'd have taken

a nap and never left the house, but just then I had to go running round the town like a common bookie. And so there was nobody near us. We could chat across the tables without leaving our places.

“ ‘ I see,’ I said, ‘ that you’re free a little earlier today, doctor ? ’

“ ‘ Well, I ran away. I went off duty,’ he said, ‘ and now I’d like to hear a little music.’

“ I replied that in our cafés, caterwauling concerts took the place of music.

“ ‘ But,’ I added, ‘ you weren’t angry at my bursting in on you so rudely at the hospital, doctor ? I must confess, I’d had a very bad dream about my wife. I’m a neurasthenic, I was terribly frightened, and like a fool came to see you this morning. Stupid things, nerves. I hope you won’t mention my visit to her ? ’

“ He set my mind at rest on this point at once, but, on the other hand, his reassuring reply had a fatal effect on me.

“ ‘ I shall say nothing to your wife,’ he said, ‘ you may be quite sure of that.’

“ ‘ Thanks,’ I said hurriedly.

“ ‘ But,’ he said, ‘ neither should I have said anything to you if she’d asked me not to. Doctors, lawyers and priests have no right to betray a secret.’

“ I didn’t show any emotion, although it cost me a great deal. With this unguarded reply, it was as if he had wound up and set in action the mechanism of the infernal machine I’d been carrying in my breast since morning.

“ ‘ Of course,’ I answered colourlessly, ‘ I don’t want to ask any awkward questions.’

“ The mechanism kept working in time with my heart, more and more strongly and smoothly. I asked the

surgeon to excuse me and ran after you into the street. I begged you then to give your brother the dollars at once. You saw for yourself that I had the air of a sleep-walker, so far as it's possible for a sleep-walker to take part in a conversation.

"The surgeon still sat there, drinking his brandy. For a long time he was buried in thought ; at last he told me he was overworked, and perhaps that was the reason why his character was deteriorating. He was terribly bored in our town and went hardly anywhere.

" ' But, doctor,' I said, ' in that case, why do you come to our place so rarely ? '

" He looked at me suspiciously :

" ' I was at your house no later than yesterday.'

" ' We shall be glad to see you today and as often as you'd care to come,' I said to him in one breath, so he should not notice the irony in my tone. ' My wife will certainly be delighted to see you,' I added, almost sarcastically. This sarcasm was the only thing left me. It was as if, with my hand in my pocket, I threatened him with my fist. Unfortunately, I had no proof at all, and both my assumptions and Sophia Dubilanka's slanders could easily have turned out to be entirely baseless. I had to discover these proofs. I decided to make it easy for both of them, for my wife above all, so that she could do whatever she pleased.

" ' Let's go home, then,' I said pleasantly. He didn't want to at all. The obstinacy with which he refused surprised me, even. Then, suddenly, he drank another brandy and looked into his glass. He studied the bottom absorbedly and with as much rapture as if he had made some dazzling discovery there. At the same time, he was deeply moved, too, with a blissful, licentious expression as if he were looking at pornographic pictures. I noticed

it in spite of my mood. He was rather embarrassed when I asked him what was the matter.

"He explained to me, with an enigmatic smile, that he adored Byzantine art, and that in the facets of the glass he could see something that brought a certain design to his mind. Immediately afterwards, he accepted my invitation without any ceremony, and we went out together. On the way, he wanted to take my arm, but that was too much and I drew back irritably.

"I can't exactly recollect what happened next, it's an agonising, stupid feeling. At a certain moment there's a break in my recollections, and I have no way of picking up the thread again. It seems to me at times as if I was not really living that evening, and that I only dreamed it. I've forgotten a lot of important things, too; for instance, I can't remember how my wife looked, or what she did. I know she was sitting on the sofa, but whether it was she or some spirit, I couldn't swear."

While Widmar complained like this to the tailor about the way his memory was impaired, Abraham Gold was comparing him with Boruch, who suffered from something similar. He did not realise himself how near the truth he was in making this comparison, for Widmar's morbid condition bordered on epilepsy. Anyhow, when Widmar entered the drawing-room with the surgeon, he looked so ill, he was so yellow and ghastly, that the hangings and curtains in the room appeared faded.

His wife greeted them coldly. She evinced no surprise at sight of the visitor. In that Widmar saw proof that she evidently expected the surgeon. She had probably invited him, but it went without saying that her husband was to know nothing about it. .

The presence of a woman at once produced in the men a slightly cataleptic condition, both mental and physical.

Both Widmar and the surgeon spoke and acted as in a trance, and at the end of a quarter of an hour, neither one nor the other could have repeated the least fragment of their conversation. Although this was empty and superficial, its undercurrent was deep but exclusively sexual. Under cover of words and phrases bereft of meaning, it concealed the restlessness of an extraordinary tension of the senses. There was in it a strange mixture of the empty and the essential, of the illusory and the absolute.

Rebecca was sitting on the settee. Yet her presence seemed something utterly unreal; Rebecca as such did not exist at all! Her thoughts and her psychic aura took up no place in space or time. One could look through her as through a glass or into a vacuum. Her existence was problematical, in fact, and the surgeon asked himself now and then whether she was not a spectre. This bodilessness, it might be called this wraith-like quality, was in the highest degree annoying, and the surgeon despised himself as a man for devoting so much time to a female phantom.

But from another viewpoint, the fact of her existence, and this existence itself, imposing its laws on everyone, was undeniable. Although there seemed to be an empty place on the sofa, only a vacant seat, at the same time it appeared, and there was absolute certainty in the knowledge, that a being without form was there, or rather an abstract sum of human properties. It was a kind of monster. It was made up of a strange combination of looks and smiles and moving arms, of woman's legs and breasts and belly, and above all of sensual desires and scents. It filled the whole room, in which prevailed an atmosphere as absorbed as at spiritualist séances.

On the sofa sat a spirit who, from time to time, kept materialising before their eyes

JEALOUSY AND MEDICINE

The surgeon was again burning with love and desire. His head aching from the erotic scent, he stood up and took his leave. Dusk had fallen, it was stifling. Rebecca glanced at the surgeon's yellow eyes, he kissed her hand ; the husband turned away.

From that moment Widmar recollected everything that had happened very clearly. And here it is :

" We expect you tomorrow," he said.

The surgeon replied :

" Oh, no thanks ! It's not done to come every day."

At that, Widmar took him by the arm and accompanied him out to the passage. There the surgeon picked up his hat and stick with a quick movement and continued :

" The wind doesn't stop."

" No, it doesn't."

They both smiled at each other and bowed cordially, though with some reserve. Widmar stroked his beard and the surgeon, whistling, sprang out on to the stone porch. The air blowing on Widmar through the open door seemed to come from an open furnace. Widmar shut the door with an effort and went back to the drawing-room immediately. At this moment his wife put out the lights and went into her room.

Widmar was excited and agitated beyond words. His thoughts were running in two parallel directions : first, he reflected that the doctor was already in the street, and then that, today again, his wife would say goodnight to him at the door of her bedroom.

He lit a cigarette, his hand shaking. In the open doorway his wife's dark silhouette was outlined against the orange-coloured background. Widmar called :

"Rebecca?" and heaved a sigh of inward relief. Dr. Tamten had left at last. In the glow of his cigarette he could make out the adored features. His wife stood motionless, perhaps she was waiting.

"Rebecca?" he repeated in a questioning voice. He wondered: "Will she beckon me with her finger?" He desired her as a young lover, he was ready to fall on his knees and kiss her feet. But she did not make the movement he waited for; then, embittered, he cried within him: "And yet I have rights over her, haven't I, even according to the law." He crushed his cigarette between his fingers, the sparks flew on to the carpet. Gloomy and rather aloof, he said again:

"Rebecca"

She did not let him finish. She had understood in a flash and replied:

"I haven't been feeling well for some days"

"How could I have forgotten it?" said Widmar in amazement, and at the same time he remembered Dr. Tamten. In the same moment, Rebecca offered her face to Widmar as if for a kiss; Widmar quivered, threw his cigarette end into the ash-tray, and took a step forward. At the same moment, in the street, behind the windows, there was a shout, followed by a crack. Widmar, arms outstretched, took another step, Rebecca drew back inside the bedroom; a rosy light fell on her, while Widmar, on the other hand, was in shadow. She leaned forward, listening, and asked:

"Was that someone shouting?"

"Nothing of the kind," replied Widmar. He stood outside the doorway, tugging his beard.

At the same moment a shout rang out in the street and another crack. It was a shot from a Browning. Widmar's wife said to him sharply:

"Open the window and see what's going on in the street. That was certainly someone shouting."

"Nothing of the kind," he repeated, but he opened the window obediently, looked out into the night and asked loudly :

"What's going on there ? "

"Nothing !" and surgeon Tamten crossed the road.

The night was very dark when he left Widmar's house. It was awful weather, and the wind howled. The surgeon had gone down the steps and at once felt all his gloomy forebodings thronging back. "Have to put an end to these old wives' superstitions," he thought. The forebodings and the expectation of danger which had been plaguing him for some days had been changed that day into an absolute certainty, and during Widmar's visit to the hospital, he already felt distinctly that this evening would bring him some disaster.

He had performed three operations and gone back to his room. He had decided not to go out anywhere, not even where he used to go every day. He had breakfasted with the black cat sitting on the table and looking at him, purring. The housekeeper had come in and the surgeon had said :

"When you see my little aunt"

The housekeeper had replied :

"You'd better lie down for a rest after breakfast, doctor."

But the surgeon did not want to sleep. He sat at his writing-desk and began writing a letter to his only friend, a lecturer at the Vienna polyclinic, Wilhelm von Fuchs. One paragraph of the letter read :

"Today I was visited by the husband of that patient

on whom we operated, you remember, when you were on holiday with me. You're well acquainted, Willy, with the history of this operation, and the role it has played in my life, and yet I'm afraid you don't fully appreciate its importance.

"The husband wanted, if I may put it thus, to bring about a collision between the human and the medical conscience, which would have been amusing enough without his gloomy air, and without the sinister forebodings which are haunting me. For some unknown reason he demanded an answer from me; which, it goes without saying, I didn't give him for the simple reason that I couldn't do so.

"I don't know what he'd got into his head, but I'm positive he suspects me of having relations with his wife. I feel that Rebecca is beginning to play a fatal role in my life. I can't stop thinking of her every free moment. She's always before my eyes. I can see her dark face everywhere, and that strange line we talked about, you remember. Work's my only escape. So I'm working hard"

At the end of the letter the surgeon added :

"As for my assistant, Rubinski, you were right. I shall have to get rid of him, because I have no confidence in him, either as a doctor or a man. Besides, he behaves without any tact, and I know he runs me down to everybody"

It grew dark and unfriendly in the four tall rooms facing north. Although he had decided not to go anywhere, the surgeon changed, perfumed himself, and after a snack, left the hospital.

He looked thoroughly dissatisfied with himself, and studied himself in detail, as under X-rays, coming to the

conclusion that his illness was making terrible progress and that it would not pass without a surgical operation, let us say without a sentimental amputation. "I decided not to see her today," he noted, scrupulously, as if for a clinical examination," but in spite of that I know, as long as I haven't seen her, I shall go on trying to. I've let a bad habit get hold of me, I need Rebecca and her presence in stronger and stronger doses. My attempts to struggle against her and to be satisfied little by little with smaller doses, have failed. I shall have to break with her and go back to other women. That's '*remedium amoris*.' " But all the other women who came to his imagination by way of a cure reminded him of the artificial prostheses given to patients in place of their amputated limbs. "It can't be helped," he told himself at last, "that's better than sticking to a bad habit." Unfortunately, he still had a juvenile propensity for taking serious things lightly when he encountered them outside his hospital life. "Besides, it's nobody's business," he said to himself, "it's my own private affair. Indeed, there's nothing unusual in it, it's been going on since Adam: a natural inclination towards women, a lucky sexual choice, probably regular internal secretions, and so on. And then, for a second's sensual pleasure, don't men give everything?" He was very sensual, sometimes carrying it to debauchery, but at the same time he knew how to associate these inclinations of his with a lyrical sentimentality. "Rebecca!" he repeated solemnly, enchanted merely by thinking of her, "when shall I again see the marvellous lines of your body, your lily-strewn belly!" A moment after, however, he had changed: frivolous and cynical, he finished his almost Solomonic exclamation with this coarse, masculine observation: "We men, we must all have a girl to sleep with sometimes," or something even worse.

He dived into the café, a song on his lips. Nothing haunted him any more, nothing bothered him any more. Hospital, operations, illnesses, patients, death, all this was far away behind him. "Rebecca, don't torture a man!" he was humming, when he suddenly found himself face to face with Abraham Gold. All his gaiety vanished. The surgeon stared in surprise at the tailor, who stood gaping at him.

"So you've become a frequenter of cafés?" growled the surgeon, and at once a crowd of the most sinister forebodings invaded his mind. But he shrugged his shoulders and went bounding on his way. The waiter bowed: "Brandy and soda?" "Yes, yes," he replied, and noticed Widmar three tables away. Widmar looked like a seasick man. His strikingly handsome face was ghastly pale, there was an avid light in his burning eyes. "Greetings again, doctor! You're a bit earlier today," he exclaimed, and the surgeon fingered something in his back pocket with satisfaction. This verification gave him a very agreeable feeling: six shots in the chamber, one in the barrel! In spite of this, he answered pleasantly: "Heavens! I ran away from the place, I'm over-worked," and he went on drinking his brandy and soda, mastering his uneasy thoughts with an effort.

Then Widmar went up to him and invited him to visit them: "You really must come, we're expecting you, my wife and I..." In the surgeon's eyes, this invitation had a mean and dangerous aspect, the instinct of self-preservation told him to defend himself to the last, and so he rejected the proposal in an almost rude tone. "No!" he said, "I'm sorry, no!" He drank a little more brandy, happened to glance into his glass, and groaned with emotion. Love went surging through his head again; at the bottom of the glass he saw a naked woman. He saw

her belly, whose line he knew by heart, and her lovely olive face like a Byzantine saint. "Ah!" he groaned. He was pierced with an invincible desire to see her at once, whatever might happen later. Widmar himself embodied the angel who wanted to lead him to paradise, "or to hell, even!" he said to himself.

"Let's go, let's go," he began gaily, seizing his angel's arm.

"If this state of ecstasy had lasted a little longer," thought the surgeon later, "who knows whether, in the end, I might not have thrown my arms round Widmar and confessed the whole truth to him. I was capable of going utterly mad and asking him for his wife's hand.

"But this blissful mood soon vanished, and I was filled with overwhelming anxiety again, which even the sight of Rebecca could not dispel. On the contrary, I'd say that the joy of our meeting heightened its tension.

"Never before had this woman produced on me the effect of something so utterly unreal. For instance, I could distinctly visualise her body beneath her dress. I knew it so well, down to the smallest detail, inaccessible even to her husband: and yet, I was not at all sure that her body really existed. Moreover, I was unable to decide whether it was beautiful or ugly; and I suspect that, at times, nobody knows it for certain.

"That evening, I remember, she talked about innocent things in a singularly immodest way, so much so that at moments I had the impression her dress was slipping off, and that we were looking at Rebecca naked. It was too much. I felt that my mood was provoking in her an almost sadistic pleasure. With an effort, I forced myself to leave. My anxiety kept growing, and when I went out into the street, all my premonitions burst forth within me, increased threefold. Then, too, the appalling

weather made my condition worse and had a frightfully irritating influence on my nerves."

The weather really was very bad. The tempest was raging. The noisome mustiness of rotting leaves and autumnal mould were borne along on gusts of wind. The surgeon cursed the weather. He stood still a few minutes, waiting for his eyes to grow accustomed to the darkness. Then he went down the street with a rapid step. He had passed Widmar's house and was already approaching the neighbouring one. Suddenly, a stifled laugh came to him from the ruined doorway. The surgeon stopped. In the dusk he could make out the angle of the down-pipe, from which a shadow loomed up. The surgeon drew back, the shadow came near and a voice at his ear asked :

" Got a light, doctor ? "

When the surgeon recalled his adventure, he always stressed that the most horrible thing was the darkness in which everything was enveloped, and which produced a sensation of total psycho-physical disorientation. " The shadows were so thick round about that it seemed as if I'd been shoved into a bottle of ink. It was really a miracle I was able to see the angle of the broken down-pipe at the side of a recess, probably the gate. It's the pipe that saved me, really. I was walking very quickly and if it hadn't attracted my attention, I should most certainly not have stopped. But at one particular moment, I'd noticed on my left a black, vertical line bent at an acute angle. With surprising swiftness, I concluded this was the outline of the rain-pipe. The very instant this came into my mind, I noticed to my great alarm that the vertical suddenly broke, moved forward, became convex and knobbly : at last it assumed the shape of a human head and shoulders. The silhouette of this man's figure was fixed momentarily on my retina,

like a dark flash. At the same time, a laugh rang out and I retreated a step. It was then I experienced the sensation of helplessness and defencelessness that is provoked in us by darkness. Faced by real danger, a man, even unarmed, has a greater feeling of security by day than the best armed, facing an imaginary danger, but in the dark. And then, hitting in the dark is infinitely harder than in the light. For a while, I personally had the impression of having lost control of my arms and legs."

"I don't smoke," replied the surgeon, calmly enough.

"A pity!"

The wind was howling frightfully, the tall silhouette of a man stooped over the surgeon, who was struck on shoulder and head with a stick. He staggered and, in spite of himself, uttered a cry. More angry than frightened, he rushed towards Widmar's house; in the shadows, he received another blow and fell. He felt infinitely safer on the ground. Lithe as a cat, he rose quickly on one knee, pulled out his Browning and fired haphazard. Suddenly he was aware of a man's presence very near him; he stretched out his arm, found a hand and fired a second time. There was a groan and then the sound of feet: someone was making off along the wooden footwalk.

The surgeon whistled his song, revolver in hand, and contemplated Widmar's house with an amused and contemptuous look; one of the windows opened and a lightish patch—the grey beard—appeared above the sill:

"What's going on there?" shouted Widmar.

"Nothing!" and the surgeon crossed the street.

For a minute longer Widmar looked after him. The surgeon had already reached the side-street, taken a

cab and gone some hundred yards on his way before old Widmar decided to shut the window. When he had done this, he turned round and saw his wife in front of him.

Meanwhile, the surgeon urged on his cabby and arrived at the hospital. Luckily, nobody ran to meet him. Everything was all right, therefore, but when the surgeon rushed upstairs to his flat, he noticed the old house physician, Boguski, arguing with the attendant about something. "It's a crime!" cried the old doctor, hoarsely. "Why didn't you let me know about the hæmorrhage in the second ward? The patient rang for three quarters of an hour! . . . Where's the matron?" The doctor was trembling and on the point of tears. White-bearded and with a bald and shining forehead, he was shaking the attendant as if he might have been able to inspire him with all his own love for his neighbour, and his anxiety for human life.

"Listen," he began, when he noticed Dr. Tamten, "two hæmorrhages! . . . It's certainly the wind . . . One sister won't do . . . I could manage myself, but, I . . ." The surgeon bowed gravely. "Doctor," he said—he never called the old man 'colleague,'—"Doctor, I'll do whatever you ask. Another sister? Of course, of course." He put his hand to his head. The old doctor grew frightened. "But my dear fellow, you've got a lump on your head, where did you get it?" The surgeon replied: "An accident, doctor." The old man grew still more frightened. "A car?" he almost shouted. "No," smiled the surgeon, "a stick." A sister rushed down the stairs. Boguski went on: "Please, never go by car, because God only knows how many people are getting smashed up in them! . . ." The surgeon knew the old man's terror of cars, he smiled again and repeated:

"A stick" But the old man had no more time to listen. Rubbing his eyes, he dashed off to his hæmorrhage patient. As he went, he muttered, "I'll stay with him all night myself. Why give the sisters any trouble?"

For the first time, the superintendent looked after him with a sad, grave air. Noiselessly he tiptoed along the corridors and then ordered the sister to see that the house-physician did not overtire himself. "Oh, and one more thing," he added, "if they bring a man in who's been shot by a revolver bullet, please waken me."

As soon as he was home, the surgeon washed his head, the bump was insignificant. He spoke to the cat: "Puss, puss, puss." The cat was very pleased and arched her back.

At the same moment, Widmar was sitting in his study, scrabbling over his wife's letters. "Shall I find out why she smiled?" he wondered angrily. "What did that smile mean, a minute ago?" When, after the incident with the surgeon and the shouts in the street, he had at last shut the window, he had turned and seen his wife in front of him. For the first time in his life he found her as if deep in thought. "That was Dr. Tamten who shouted," she said at last. "What an idea!" he replied, to calm her down. "I saw him walk quietly down the street." "I know it was he who shouted," she repeated, and it was then Widmar noticed a smile appear on her face. That smile disconcerted him completely. "Why did she smile?" He was worried because he could not understand it in the least. In his study, he could not shake off this strange impression for a long time. "She smiled, but why?" Furious, he turned the letters over and over, but he found nothing there, although the very paper stank of lies and betrayal.

Next morning, the tailor went to the power station to

see his brother, the engineer Isaac, to whom he had to hand over a sum of money for beating up the Medical Superintendent of All Saints' Hospital, Dr. Tamten.

He had left his children at home, playing in the yard. Boruch held a big kite in his hands, Angela carried the kite's long tail, made of strips of rag. Boruch was red, Angela, black.

The wind had been blowing for three successive days, the ash-tree growing in the yard had already lost all its leaves, the clusters of berries were swinging wildly, and the trunk of the ash-tree was split. Late autumn was approaching. And yet, there was a torrid heat by day, while by night, the hot wind was sticky and intolerable.

Boruch, as usual, had no luck : his sister had broken a cup and said he had done it : a big, white dog with a brown spot on its nose, came into the yard and would not leave it for anything : the kite Boruch was playing with slipped out of his hands and was lost for ever in space. Besides, an unknown lady was partly to blame, a lady who appeared at the window.

It was noon exactly when the tailor went to the power station, Boruch was doing something to his kite, his sister helped him as she held the tail. The wind ruffled his mop, blood-red as autumn leaves. There was a noise somewhere high up. Boruch lifted his head and noticed that a first-floor window in the neighbouring house had been opened noisily. Boruch was very short, the fence prevented his seeing what was happening at the window. So he dashed to the other end of the yard, and climbed on to the dustbin. He grasped his kite tightly in one hand. Angela, bad-tempered and malicious, was bawling as she tugged the ragged tail, but Boruch was staring up and listening.

In the open window of the house opposite stood a lady

whom he already knew slightly, frightening and alluring at the same time. The lady was combing her hair, short but thick, and letting her gaze wander somewhere over the chimneys of their house. Most frightening of all, she had no dress on. A lace wrapper fell from one shoulder, and her naked body and a marvellously rosy breast could be seen. This unnatural rosy colour of the skin troubled Boruch. It seemed to him quite frightening, and at the same time sweet, and Boruch was convinced that, if one licked it, it would taste like a sweet. But what troubled him, and even roused his horror, were these breasts, whose baggy shape he found incomprehensible and unpleasant. "What are those bags for?" he asked himself, judiciously, but Angela suddenly screamed from down below: "Get off the dustbin, Boruch, you wretch!" He did not come down because he was staring, open-mouthed, at the sugary lady, languid and strange.

For sheer spite, Angela burst out sobbing in real earnest. The lady stopped combing her hair, looked at the dog, Angela, Boruch. She raised her eyebrows in astonishment, showed her pretty teeth, and called to the children in a merry voice, but Boruch felt that the cheerfulness was forced, and that the voice rang false and insincere.

"You!" cried the lady. "What are you doing down there? Are you by any chance spying on me, brat?"

"I'm not a brat," retorted Boruch gravely, "I'm a postman."

"Would you believe it!" said the lady, and burst out laughing.

Boruch's ear was very sensitive to untruth, he caught the insincerity in this laughter. The naked lady moved uneasily at the window and added:

"Don't tell anyone you saw me here! Eh, Mr. Postman?"

The naked body leaned out of the window, the horribly pink arms waved, the lady laughed with all her heart, frankly and gaily, so that Angela herself stopped bawling, and the big white dog began wagging his tail joyfully. But little Boruch did not let himself be caught so easily. Boruch had no faith in the lady's laughter, and stared at her distrustfully. This urchin possessed a rare and precious gift. Some children, almost from the cradle, hear sounds and words, or see pictures, and then become artists. Boruch had a much more extraordinary gift ; his ear was so marvellously constructed that he detected people's slightest insincerity in a flash, and reacted to truth and falsehood with all the sensitiveness of a tuning-fork.

" Hi, Mr. Postman," called the naked lady from her window, " where are your letters ? "

A gust of wind went howling by, the ash-tree groaned, the wind tore the kite from Boruch's hands and carried it away high up into the sky.

" Oh, dear ! " cried Angela.

At first, Boruch was put out, then, sullen and triumphant, he shouted :

" There, that's my letter ! " and pointed upwards. At the same time his ear could hear that he was telling the truth.

In fact, the kite, like a white letter, flew higher and higher in the sky till it disappeared from sight. The lady waved her hand condescendingly, said once again : " Don't tell anyone ! " and shut the window quickly. Then she drew the cream lace curtain.

" What have you done with the kite ? " Angela sobbed across the yard, with the dog rendering a bass accompaniment.

· Boruch climbed down from the dustbin, and, for some unfathomable reason, began to sob. In his case, tears invariably preceded convulsions and fainting. Soon he lay twitching under the ash-tree. Fortunately, it was just the moment when the tailor returned home.

He came running, or rather flying along, driven before the mighty wind. Abraham Gold carefully shut the gate behind him, for that was his custom, and turned round with a craven air, somewhat mysterious in his appalling ugliness. He glanced about on every side as if some lurking, malevolent enemy lay in wait for him. He looked fearfully at the sky, too, as if an enemy were concealed there, as well.

“ Boruch,” he called to the boy, “ what are you crying for ? ”

“ He’s bēen beating me again,” lied Angela.

Boruch’s face was distorted, bathed in tears. He began jabbering something about a lady, at the window. This story made the tailor very uneasy. His curiosity burst out together with a jet of spittle from his lips. “ What lady ? Where ? At which window ? My son, Boruch, tell me, what was she like ? Do you remember if she had dark hair ? Very dark, you say ? ” But at this moment, Boruch began to squint, there was a pinkish foam on his lips. He gave vent to strange, hoarse cries, and fell down, twitching. Gold the tailor took off his jacket and covered his son’s grimacing face. He mentally repeated the prayers appropriate to the occasion. Angela gazed enviously at Boruch, who could jerk his legs in such a funny way. The big white dog at last ran out of their yard and could be heard howling in his mournful bass at the front of the house. When Boruch regained consciousness, the wretched tailor did not ask him about the multiplication table this time. He was afraid his son

would have forgotten not only seven times eight, but something much more important, too.

"What colour was this lady's hair? You said it was black as a raven's wing? Say it again"

To his great disappointment, Boruch answered :

"The lady was fair-haired, I'm sure. She had rosy bags and hair as light as straw"

The tailor could make nothing more out of these mumblings.

"Go and lie down, Boruch," and he himself rushed out into the street. "Have to ask Mr. Widmar first what he thinks about it," he thought.

He knew where to find Widmar, on the café terrace, as usual. It was their third meeting alone together.

"Good-day, sir," said the tailor in a voice quivering with both humility and pathos. •

Widmar, who was scrawling something on a bit of paper, jumped at the unexpected voice. He suppressed a movement of anger and disgust, in spite of everything he could not habituate himself to the repulsive, macabre aura surrounding the tailor. When he had regained his self-possession, he announced in an almost friendly way :

"Listen, Gold, I've collected nearly all the evidence. But this cursed business hasn't been altogether cleared up yet !"

The tailor sat down on the very edge of a chair, fixed his tearful eyes on Widmar, and crossed his hands on his breast, the dark violet finger-nails like those of a corpse.

"You understand," Widmar went on, and it was obvious that neither the attention nor the understanding of his companion mattered to him in the least. He was only concerned with uttering words for his own relief.

It did not matter to whom he spoke so long as he talked. And so he went jabbering on, staring in front of him with a burning, infuriated look. "This cursed business hasn't been quite solved yet, you understand. What's the meaning of the eighth minute?"

"Eighth minute?" asked the tailor, "eighth? But I wanted to tell you something else, sir."

"Ah?" cried Widmar, as if he had suddenly come to himself. He apprehended in a flash what it was about: "The window."

"The window," the old man repeated in a shamefaced way. Stammering, he told Widmar the story of his son Boruch, and the lady at the window. "But," he ended, "he said afterwards she was blonde."

This was, of course, a dreadful disappointment. Widmar replied:

"If this turns out to be all bosh or made up, I'll teach you!"

The tailor was ready for any eventuality, he even drew back as he was sure Widmar was going to hit the table again, or belabour him with his fists. Fortunately, there was no outburst. Widmar was occupied with something quite different. "The eighth minute," he repeated, rubbing his forehead in perplexity.

"About this operation," he said at last, "the devil only knows what really did happen. They're all idiots."

These last words applied, no doubt, to Rubinski, the matron, and the attendant Paul, with whom Widmar had had several conversations. He had invited Rubinski to lunch at the café, and had tortured him for two solid hours by the clock, as an investigating judge cross-examines a criminal. "You must tell me what happened, clearly. As a medical man, you're bound to understand, aren't you? I promise you not to make any use of your

words." But all this had not the least effect. In fact, it was impossible to get to the bottom of the eighth minute.

"In that case," suggested Widmar, "isn't there anything in last year's records, so that I could look up the history of the illness for myself?"

"I hardly think there'll be anything about it now," replied Rubinski. At that moment, the house-surgeon was alarmed at his own lack of discretion. "It was careless and stupid of me to tell you that," he explained, covered with shame, "it's an almost criminal action on my part." Widmar hurriedly reassured him. "In the first place you've told me nothing," he began with cunning hypocrisy. "And secondly, the superintendent dislikes both of us. Dislikes us intensely, you know!" "Oh, yes!" cried Rubinski in relief. He let himself be caught by this primitive bait. His hatred of Dr. Tamten was a spring on which Widmar could press without any fear of going too far, boldly profiting from all subsequent confidences. "So please do look into the records," he said as they parted, and he was left alone in the café, terribly shaken by the news. It was the only thing he troubled about for the time being.

"Operation!" he exclaimed to the tailor. "Do you know how this operation was performed, do you?"

THE OPERATION

THE information Widmar had gathered about the affair in question was almost complete, with the exception of a solitary point on which it was impossible to throw any light. It concerned what had occurred during the operation, driving the surgeon to such fury and depression. It concerned that enigmatic something which had happened after the eight minutes following the patient's being anæsthetised and the first cut of the knife. It was

just after these eight minutes that something had happened in the operating-theatre which neither the matron nor the house-surgeon could make out. In any case it suggested the idea of a catastrophe, it was dreadful, and both of them, as well as Paul the attendant, who had prepared the instruments, felt as though they were on a ship about to founder, or in a theatre where fire and panic had broken out. It was a minute which so terrified Paul the attendant, that he wanted to drop everything and run out into the corridor. And the eighth minute was only the first in a succession of minutes that had followed, seeming to lengthen into hours.

The assistant Rubinski maintained the matron had been so terror-stricken that, just after the eighth minute, she had opened her mouth wide and stayed like that until the end of the operation, her eyes reddened by the strain as she stared transfixed at the surgeon. "She looked like a sparrow that's died with its beak open," said Rubinski by way of comparison.

Widmar, who was pursuing his enquiries with the skill of a professional detective, was not able, in spite of all his efforts, to get to the bottom of things. When, to verify Rubinski's statements, he questioned the attendant Paul about this moment, he learned nothing new. The attendant spoke about the whole matter most unwillingly.

"We were all beside ourselves. I've been working for ten years with the superintendent, and nothing like that ever happened to us before. I understood at once that something was up. I was preparing the instruments in the next room, and when I took them into the operating-theatre, I felt immediately something wasn't right. The matron looked as if she'd been anæsthetised herself instead of the patient. Rubinski was as red as a beetroot. And there was nothing surprising in that, because in a moment

it started, and Rubinski had reason enough to be frightened. It went whistling just past his cheek three times ! ”

“ The only one who wasn’t put out,” he went on, “ was the Austrian. He didn’t move the whole time, only said something in German to the superintendent once or twice. His fingers were so quick it made you shiver just to look at them. A remarkable brain, that Austrian’s.” As Widmar imagined, he was speaking of lecturer von Fuchs.

“ And did the Austrian stay long with the superintendent ? ” asked Widmar.

“ Oh, about three weeks, not less. He was our guest, and just happened to be there for the operation.”

Widmar already knew this fact from Rubinski. It was more or less this way :

A week before the operation, von Fuchs had arrived from Vienna. He had stayed with his friend, surgeon Tamten. It was a cold autumn. The lecturer had arrived in a thick, warm coat, with a silk scarf knotted round his neck. As he stepped down from the sleeping-car he was greeted by surgeon Tamten.

“ I’m very grateful to you,” he said to him in German. “ I’ve not had a holiday this year, and going abroad was out of the question.”

They shook hands, and looked into each other’s eyes. The surgeon said with concern : “ You’re much thinner.”

“ Oh no ! You’re the one who’s looking overworked,” replied the lecturer, and turned up his coat collar. He was a tall, thin-figured, bony man. His face was pale, transparent almost. There was something of the artist in his appearance, so much so that the porter who followed with his valise thought he was carrying a violin case. The patients of All Saints’ hospital had the same

impression when they saw lecturer von Fuchs striding about the hospital garden with the surgeon. They were really a comical pair. The surgeon walked ahead with his quick, elastic tread, like an animal making its way through the undergrowth. The tall, thin lecturer walked, or rather swam beside him, hardly touching the ground. When he took off his hat, the patients saw a bald, lofty forehead and long, light gold hair. "It's a musician who's staying with the superintendent," the patients told each other. They saw him once only after that, when he went on a tour of inspection with Tamten who was showing him round the hospital.

In general he was rarely seen. Every day after tea he went for a walk and did not return until late in the evening. Once, it was two days before Rebecca Widmar's operation, he set off for town with the surgeon. No sooner had they gone than somebody rang the hospital. Rubinski picked up the receiver.

"Doctor Tamten isn't here. He's just gone out. Are you phoning him about a private matter, madam?" he asked.

"No!" answered an impatient feminine voice over the telephone. "I need the help of a doctor, and I wanted to asked him to call here."

It was a disagreeable, rather husky voice: its authoritative and almost dictatorial tone annoyed Rubinski.

"I'm sorry!" he said, "but the doctor really can't come. He isn't here. One of the doctors on duty could come to you.

"That doesn't suit me at all," he heard in reply. "Could you give me some idea where the doctor is? By the way, I admit it is about an absolutely private matter."

"I don't know, at the café perhaps," was Rubinski's rejoinder, and he hung up the receiver.

Immediately after, someone rang the café which was Tamten's usual haunt, and the head waiter Pierre came up to the table where the surgeon and lecturer von Fuchs were sitting. He asked Doctor Tamten to take a call.

"It's for me?" grumbled the surgeon in displeasure. "You should have said I wasn't here. Please excuse me, Willy," and he went into the telephone-box.

"Tamten here," he said. "What a horrible voice!" he thought. "I'm awfully sorry," he exclaimed into the mouth-piece, "but I really can't come. One of my assistants could take my place."

The ear-piece buzzed, and the surgeon distinctly heard a kind of growl. "Some old hag for sure," he thought. "What's she got to croak about?"

Suddenly, the feminine voice changed over the telephone, and grew musical and lilting. It seemed as if someone entirely different were speaking. "Hallo, I'm listening!" cried the astonished doctor. For some unknown reason, he experienced a sensual excitement. The voice over the instrument stirred up within him a host of impressions, erotic, voluptuous, almost morbid. "She must be young, attractive, half-naked and lying in bed," he said to himself. He was quite convinced, even, that this was the case.

"I'm having terrible pains," said the voice, "and I'm suffering agonies," and it seemed to the surgeon that he was listening to the broadcast of some marvellous concert. But then the doctor in him awoke and he stated in a weary yet patient voice, "All right. I'm coming at once."

"I'm being called to a case," he said to his friend,

"I couldn't understand over the phone what was wrong with her"

The world of sickness and suffering from which he slipped away into his private life appeared once more before his eyes, like an importunate ghost that cannot be driven away. Hospital, overalls, dressings, instruments, went flashing through his mind, and surgeon Tamten, his features twisted in a fixed and artificial smile, left the café.

Through the window, lecturer von Fuchs saw him set off in a cab, erect and serious. And when, at the end of twenty minutes, he returned, the lecturer was surprised at his transformed, almost radiant air. He was embarrassed and strangely moved. "Very curious," he kept saying, "very curious." The lecturer threw him a penetrating, slightly inquisitive look, but asked him nothing for the moment. They were both silent, as if understanding something had happened which should not be mentioned yet. It was not until after they had returned to the hospital and had supper, that they sat down together on a bench in the garden and held a long discussion which was accidentally witnessed by the medico Rubinski. Rubinski related this conversation to Widmar, for whom it was of absorbing interest.

"I'd gone out that evening to take a short stroll," he said. "The night was bathed in moonlight and rather fresh. I'd taken out a folding-chair as I'd been suffering from sciatica not long before, and was afraid to sit on a damp bench. I set it down at a convenient spot among the bushes, and lit a cigarette, when I suddenly heard voices quite near me. I recognised the superintendent and the lecturer. I thought they were going to pass by, but they stopped and sat down on a nearby bench. I

could see them clearly through the leaves of the trees, in the greenish moonlight. The superintendent wore a sports suit and was hatless, as usual: the lecturer had a large, warm coat and a scarf round his neck. It was the superintendent who was speaking. He was very moved, if not to say excited, and his voice was so loud that, in spite of myself, I heard everything. I understand German well enough, and it wasn't difficult for me to grasp the essence of the conversation. The superintendent said:

" 'I went to see the patient. I was a little tired and bad-tempered. I'm overworked, everything falls on me. I really can't rely on anyone in the hospital.'

" Von Fuchs made some reply, but so low that I couldn't hear it. His voice usually doesn't carry and, if it's possible to use the expression, is very shy. To my intense annoyance, I could only make out that he spoke my name.

" 'Oh, he's a poor specimen,' answered the doctor.

" I confess I was intrigued and disturbed. And so I listened more attentively, and when von Fuchs began to speak again, I was able to catch nearly everything he said:

" 'I don't like your young assistant. I know instinctively what men are like, and I'm rarely mistaken. I think he's unpleasant and decidedly untrustworthy, even. Only I wouldn't like to wrong him, heaven knows . . . '

" I didn't know what to do. I wanted to get up and walk by them ostentatiously, but I hadn't time as the superintendent declared:

" 'It's not important. My visit to this patient is in my mind all the time.' And he began talking at a great rate. I felt embarrassed, as it was out of the question to get up after that. Besides, I couldn't, as it would have been

most unpleasant if they'd suspected I was eavesdropping. So I went on sitting there quietly and smoked a cigarette, though I hoped it wouldn't be long before they got up and went away.

" 'I went into the drawing-room,' the superintendent said, going on with his story, 'and presented my card. Everything in the drawing-room was yellow, carpets, curtains, furniture. For a moment I even thought I was a canary. 'Madam is very ill,' said the maid. 'She begs you to wait a minute, doctor.' Furious, I walked up and down the drawing-room. I didn't know where to look, my head was turning and my eyes were full of yellow. At last, tired of waiting, I found the bell and rang. 'I've no time to wait any longer,' I said, 'take me to the patient, please.' 'Just a moment,' the maid replied. Then she opened the door and ushered me into the room. A woman lay in bed under a yellow eiderdown. I saw her olive-skinned face and her dark, bare arms. I greeted her. 'Good morning,' she replied, throwing me a rapid, almost sly glance. 'Why hasn't Doctor Tamten come?' 'What?' I said. The woman moved on the bed and I noticed her hips quivering. Whether this was from secret pleasure or on account of her pain, I couldn't make out. 'But you're not Doctor Tamten?' I replied drily that I certainly was Doctor Tamten and that I'd come in answer to a telephone call. 'Oh, is that so?' exclaimed the woman as if surprised and disappointed. It was absurd, and I was annoyed beyond measure. I asked stiffly, 'Where does it hurt you?' and told her to lift up her nightgown. She did so at once with the dexterity of a prostitute. I don't know why, but I tried not to look at her. I examined her abdomen with my hand while gazing at the head of the bed. Under the palpation, she experienced severe pains in the region of the appendix. 'You've got a temperature,' I said. 'How much?'

'A hundred.' I took her pulse. It was accelerated and I noted irregularity, even. It was only because she was nervously excited, doubtless. And, a strange thing, while I was holding her hand I had the impression that it was not I who held her, but she who held me. I replaced the eiderdown and stood up. 'Nothing serious, madam. Appendicitis. For the moment, we can do without an operation. We'll wait until the attack is over. You're not having any vomiting?' She was suddenly frightened. 'Vomiting? Why? No, thank God, I'm not! So I'll have to have an operation?' 'Don't worry, madam,' I said, and I felt an unaccountable anxiety suddenly take possession of me, too. 'For the time being, stay quietly in bed until the pain has stopped. Don't eat anything, only a few sips of tea without sugar. When the acute symptoms have passed, we shall have to operate.' 'An operation?' she wailed, and then, for the first time, I looked at her closely.

" 'She wasn't pretty, she had a swarthy complexion, strangely dark. It even occurred to me that this was a specific pigmentation of the skin. As for her eyes, I really can't tell you what colour they were. They were enormous, and so dazzling that their flashing brilliance blinded me. I tell you again, she seemed to me positively ugly rather than pretty. But I wasn't thinking about that then, because I was concerned only with her painful anxiety which took hold of me, too, once or twice. I sensed that this woman dreaded something horribly, and I accounted for it by the patient's habitual fear before an operation. 'A trifle, a trifle,' I said, 'it's not an operation, it's child play.' 'So it's only an attack of appendicitis,' she continued. 'Thank God, I'm always imagining dreadful things.' 'What things?' I asked, and I don't know myself why I placed so much insistence on it. I was impelled by subconscious curiosity about the

diagnosis, probably. Instead of answering, she began asking me to admit her to the hospital without delay. 'I'm alone in the house, and I'm very frightened. My husband's away. Please do, doctor.' 'There's no need,' I replied, 'you should just stay in bed without moving for a few days, that's all. I'll come and see you tomorrow.' I was already at the door but she made me come back. 'Doctor!' she called. And her expression was so transformed as to make her unrecognisable. She seemed to me the loveliest woman I'd seen in my life!

"Von Fuchs said something almost in a whisper and then coughed. He readjusted the scarf round his neck.

" 'Aren't you cold?' asked the superintendent.

" 'Oh, no!' Fuchs coughed again. A moment after, he went on, 'Nobody really knows whether a woman's ugly or pretty. Perhaps even eunuchs don't know.'

"Doctor Tamten burst out laughing, but he was in a hurry to go on with his story. Both of them were bathed in greenish light. The lecturer was absolutely transparent, he might have been made of glass. The superintendent's face was deathly pale and his eyes were phosphorescent.

" 'And yet now, when I recollect my impressions,' said the doctor, 'I arrive at the conviction that she was really pretty. But, you see, I'd never bothered before to find out whether a patient was pretty or not. That's where the whole farce lies. I shook off this strange sensation as well as I could. 'All right,' I said, and I gave in'

"At this moment, lecturer von Fuchs began coughing again. The surgeon was worried. 'What's the matter? We'd better go in.'

" 'Oh, no!' replied von Fuchs. 'I only thought I could smell tobacco, as if someone were smoking here.'

"I was like a rat in a trap," Rubinski told Widmar.

"I was petrified when I heard these words. I was sure they'd get up and begin looking for me in the bushes. 'What a fool I am!' I thought. 'I ought to have put my cigarette out.' You can see my situation. I felt ashamed and at the same time full of indignation and bitterness. I put my cigarette out under my heel, and would have got up and made off without further reflection. But the surgeon continued :

" 'No, it's only your imagination. Nobody can be smoking here.'

" 'Oh, well!' Fuchs agreed, shaking his head. 'And yet it seemed to me that . . .'

"They were both green, like two drowned men covered with duckweed. The lecturer's breathing could be heard, difficult, irregular, and gasping badly. He's said to be tubercular. Then the surgeon went on.

" 'All right, come to us, madam. I'll have you taken by car so that you're not jolted.' She was obviously satisfied and calmed down at once. As I left, she offered me her hand, and this gesture threw me into a profound agitation once more. She really did it in a strange way, unusual in any case. She threw her whole arm out and grabbed on to my hand as if with a hook. And then, very quickly, she let go my hand which, I remember, hung suspended in air. 'Strange creature!' I thought. It had an irritating and rather disagreeable effect on me. I left, feeling annoyed.'

" 'You were changed when you came back to the café,' murmured the lecturer. 'I thought something had happened. In my time, I attended an old dancer. When she danced naked, all the men believed she was sixteen. Love's no different from other diseases.'

" 'In any case, I'm not afraid of it,' rejoined surgeon Tamten, and he stood up. After a moment, they both

went away, and I heard lecturer von Fuchs' cough in the distance. I got up as well, picked up my chair and went back to the hospital.

" 'Hasn't a new patient been brought in?' I asked the sister on duty.

" 'Yes. Mrs. Widmar. In a private room, number hundred and one.'

" And there, in number hundred and one, I found your wife. I confess the whole story amused me. Allow me to say quite frankly, I expected to see a vamp, but I met only a calm, attractive young woman. I thought the superintendent had spoken of a brunette, but I must have been mistaken, for your wife's hair is light chestnut. She was in bed, rosy and smiling. Beyond all doubt, she's one of the most serene and gracious people I know . . .

" Just then, she was still feeling rather ill. The pains hadn't gone, although her temperature had fallen a little, I remember. While I was asking her how she was, the door opened and the superintendent came in.

" 'What are you doing here?' he asked me in a bantering tone, though I felt he was displeased with me for some reason. 'Are you on duty today?'

" I answered that I was taking Doctor Boguski's place for a while.

" 'Aha!' he said, laughing as he always does. Exactly like a Chinese mask. Then he addressed the patient with a cold, official air: 'How are you getting along with us here?' and he led me out with him into the corridor. He was not in the very least moved or agitated, as I'd thought he was in the garden. We stood by the door and he instructed me in a whisper to watch carefully how the attack developed in the patient. 'In case there are threatening symptoms, let me know at once.'

" Nothing alarming happened during the night. The

house-physician, Boguski, who'd been to see the patient once or twice, stated that she was sleeping well and had only a slight temperature. He's a queer old buffer, our senior house-physician. He's notorious for his terrible fear of cars ! You've certainly heard about him.

" And so, in the morning, everything was all right. Superintendent Tamten looked into number hundred and one with me for a moment. I watched him closely during this visit, but he gave nothing away. He was impassive, as in his encounters with all the other patients, and kept on joking artificially.

" Headache ? ' he asked as he went out.

" ' A little,' replied the patient. ' But I know why.'

" He stopped in the doorway.

" ' Why ? '

" ' It's because there's a smell of petrol from somewhere, and I can't bear that smell.'

" ' Petrol ? ' he repeated, and, turning to me, ' What about it, doctor, can you smell petrol ? '

" And he sniffed loudly.

" I sniffed, too.

" ' I can't smell anything, doctor.'

" ' Aha ! ' and he darted into the corridor. He ran down the stairs as he always did, muttering something to himself cheerfully.

" It was a Wednesday, I remember, for I was on duty. Flowers were brought to the lady in a hundred and one, two huge bouquets, but the attendant told us she'd had them bought herself to counteract the smell of petrol in her room. Paul devoted himself to her service to the extent of neglecting his duties, so much so that the superintendent noticed it and reprimanded him. As for the sisters, they didn't like the patient much. I really can't remember why.

"The Wednesday passed quietly, we were sure that from now on all would go well. Towards midnight, I went into the duty-room and set to work. I didn't go to my own room as I was afraid of falling asleep, and I had to study for an examination in general pathology. Through the panes in the door of the duty-room, I could see part of the corridor lit by a dimmed light. The corridor looked dark and long. At the end I could see a sister sitting at a small table. She held her head stiff and upright, while her hands lay motionless on the table. I was amazed she could sleep in this position. At her side, something black lay on the parquet floor. I thought it was her shoes, as her feet were wrapped in a rug. It seemed likely that my duty would be quiet. Up to one o'clock, nobody rang. Apparently there were no patients in a serious condition, and so I could study without being disturbed and the sister could sleep. But towards half-past one, the bell resounded in the night.

"It was shrill and strident. I looked up from my book and noticed that the sister had already thrown the rug off her feet, while, instead of shoes, she was putting on soft slippers. I bent my head and went on reading, but the bell didn't stop and tortured my nerves. 'What the devil's happening?' I wondered. The sister ran down the passage to the other wing and then I heard a door bang. But I saw her come running back in a little while. I went to meet her. She was running clumsily, her feet hindered by her long, stiff gown.

"'Number hundred and one, doctor,' she panted.

"'What's the matter?' I asked.

"'She got out on to the floor,' I heard, but I was already in the room in question myself.

"The patient was hanging half out of bed. At the head I noticed a damp, whitish patch on the floor.

The patient's eyelids were lowered, her eyes could be seen rolled up in a squinting, unconscious stare. I caught her pulse. It was thready, fading.

" 'Open the window!' I called to the sister. Then the patient, as if coming to herself, twisted on the bed and writhed to the very edge, while her teeth started chattering. I knew what that meant. A yellowish fluid was running from her mouth.

" 'Cold compress!' I called to the sister, and I myself rushed to the duty-room. I got through on the phone to the superintendent's apartment. He answered at once.

" 'Doctor,' I said to him, 'number hundred and one, collapse and vomiting.'

" 'Aha!' surgeon Tamten rejoined, 'on the operating table!'

During the night of Wednesday to Thursday, surgeon Tamten and his friend, lecturer Wilhelm von Fuchs, had chatted a long time, sitting beside the fire. The night was exceptionally cold for the season. The fire was blazing up the chimney. Lecturer von Fuchs held out his long, delicate hands to the flames.

"The problem of marriage grows more and more disturbing. The woman's role in our times is already so considerable that it's becoming dangerous and unhealthy."

Surgeon Tamten purred like a cat: "The woman's role begins and ends in bed. For me, at least."

"I'd like to believe it," sighed the lecturer. "But unfortunately, I don't know any two married people or lovers, even, where the woman's role is confined to that. Not at any price will the man grasp that the woman does just what she wants with him. But I'd still agree to that if only she'd want something good. Her influence

is degrading, if not positively destructive. I know dozens of artists and scientists who've given up half their ambitions on account of their wives. The woman is absolute. She pursues the gratification of her desires with a perseverance of which the average man is incapable. She also pursues the gratifying of her instinct to dominate him. There doesn't exist a docile or obedient woman. There aren't any."

"I doubt that!" The surgeon burst out laughing again and purred. "It's impossible to take such a problem seriously!"

But the lecturer went on, "The thing that's so characteristic and really sad is that men won't accept my point of view. Within themselves, women always admit I'm right. Men, on the contrary, laugh at me or try not to discuss the subject. There are some ideas that have no success simply because they're unpleasant. Who knows whether it isn't a process of psychological repression there, the same as psycho-analysts have found in certain individuals. Man forgets, he tries not to think about anything that makes his conscience uncomfortable, or disturbs his psychical balance in some way. The same process can be developed in the general human psyche. There are ideas condemned beforehand to have no success. It depends solely on whether or not they trouble men's peace of mind."

The surgeon smiled. This business had not the slightest interest for him. He retorted: "It's not as bad as that. The world of ideas goes on developing in spite of everything. As for your opinion about women, perhaps you're right, but up to the present, feminine emancipation hasn't done us any harm."

The lecturer continued: "All men say just that. Consider Weininger, for example, who was the first to

grow alarmed at the role of woman in the world: the masculine sex proved to be absolutely hostile to him. Yes, yes, it's men above all who are the opponents of his theories. It's very chivalrous, but not very wise. The rule of women over each of us is too obvious to be discounted. We're living at a time when matriarchy is imminent."

The night was far advanced. Lecturer von Fuchs stood up, tall and thin. The fire was going out.

The surgeon's cat jumped noiselessly off the mantelpiece. The lecturer coughed long and painfully.

"We must go to bed." He gazed in front of him with the faded blue eyes of the tubercular. His face was calm and handsome, recalling that of an artist. Before leaving, he told the surgeon a long story about a curious case of cancer he had had at the Vienna polyclinic. "I operated, knowing the case was utterly hopeless," he said.

They washed in turn in the bathroom. The old housekeeper got up and put out the lights.

At half-past one in the morning, just as lecturer von Fuchs and surgeon Tamten had fallen asleep, the telephone at the surgeon's bedside began to ring. The surgeon awoke at once, put the receiver to his warm ear and said, "Tamten here."

On the other side of the wall, the lecturer awoke just as mechanically, probably following an old habit of many years, put a eucalyptus pastille in his mouth and listened. The surgeon recognised Rubinski's voice over the telephone.

"Number hundred and one, collapse, vomiting."

He asked: "Who is number hundred and one? Mrs. Widmar?"

Hoarse sounds and whistlings came from the telephone,

and the surgeon said simply : " Oh, well ! In that case, straight to the operating table ! "

He hung up the receiver, put on his things quickly like an automaton and, on tiptoe so as not to waken his friend, went into the drawing-room. There he saw lecturer von Fuchs in long, green-striped pyjamas, stiffly ironed.

" You have a sudden operation ? " asked the lecturer without surprise.

The surgeon answered : " It's the patient with appendicitis."

" Vomiting ? " asked the lecturer.

The surgeon answered : " I already suspected it this morning. She had a headache."

" Oh, yes ! " said the lecturer, chewing. He had the eucalyptus pastille in his mouth.

Surgeon Tamten put on his gown. " Excuse my having wakened you," he said as he was about to leave his apartment, but the lecturer stopped him.

" Oh, no," he said. " I'm going to help you."

" No, no. You've come to have a rest here."

" Oh, that doesn't matter," and lecturer von Fuchs started to dress.

" Take a blouse from my cupboard," cried surgeon Tamten, dashing through the sisters' refectory, empty at that moment, to the hospital corridor.

The lecturer dressed himself with dexterity. His every movement was calm, calculated, economical. He took one of surgeon Tamten's surgical blouses, and put on a fresh gown. In his gown he appeared still taller. He brushed back the golden hair from his forehead and went out.

He went gliding along the corridors in his white

sandals, noiselessly, like a white spectre, staring in front of him with a fixed, expressionless look. The door which shut behind him enclosed in Tamten's apartment the private life of the two doctors.

Calm and cool, he glided quietly to the operating theatre. In the first room a sterilizer was humming, an electric stove burned, it was stiflingly hot, as in a greenhouse.

In the first room three big, glass cupboards with instruments were ranged along the walls. On the right was a basin, over which shone a nickel-plated tap with a large, protruding handle.

In the middle of the second room, through the glass ceiling of which the black sky could be seen, stood an operating table, severe in outline. Above hung a scialitic lamp, which cast no shadows; at one side was a large searchlight; in one corner a small, white, metal table, on which nickel-plated cases were laid out.

In the first room, surgeon Tamten stood over the basin in white linen trousers, black, gleaming galoshes that reached above the ankles, short-sleeved shirt and waterproof apron. Surgeon Tamten stooped over the basin, washing his hands, scrubbing them with a hard brush. From time to time, he opened the protruding tap with his elbow, rinsed off the foam in hot water, and soaped his arms again up to the elbows. The assistant Rubinski was also scrubbing his hands a little further off; the surgeon grunted in his direction: "You could have washed your hands a little earlier, doctor." The matron came in, still sleepy, pale, and began preparing the bottles of ether.

The steriliser was humming, the attendant Paul was busy round the stove, boiling instruments. Lecturer von Fuchs, with an accustomed gesture, let fall his gown and stood, like Tamten, in white trousers and low-necked,

short-sleeved blouse. He put on a waterproof apron, then took a free brush and scrubbed his hands. It was two o'clock in the morning. Surgeon Tamten opened the tap with his elbow and rinsed off the foam.

"Where's the patient?" he asked the attendant. "More soap for me, please."

The attendant ran out into the corridor, the surgeon called after him: "Bring the patient."

Medico Rubinski was scrubbing his elbows with the brush, and lecturer von Fuchs was washing and scrubbing his hands, too. As he brushed his long, thin fingers, and without looking at the floor, he slipped his right foot in its white sandal into one tall galosh, then his left into the other and rinsed off the foam under the tap. It was hot in the room, and smelt of ether and mustiness, but surgeon Tamten and the lecturer snuffed up this familiar atmosphere like balm.

The trolley rolled along the corridor with a soft rumble. Something white was lying on the trolley, the sister on duty walked alongside, and the attendant Paul was pushing. It was a few minutes past two. The doctors were washing and scrubbing their hands. The door of the theatre opened noiselessly, and the patient was wheeled in, covered with a sheet. Neither surgeon Tamten nor the lecturer glanced round, they were bent over the basin. Foam flew in every direction. The surgeon said only: "We can begin," and scrubbed his skin with the brush again. The attendant pushed the trolley into the second room; the matron was already waiting for the patient there. The trolley was just rolling into the operating theatre when the patient uttered a stifled cry.

Surgeon Tamten asked brusquely: "What's the matter?"

The lecturer raised his head for a moment, he glanced

in the direction of the trolley and smiled slightly, as if he knew by heart what was to follow. The patient cried in a choked voice :

“ The instruments ! ”

At that, the surgeon showed all his teeth in an artificial smile and washed his hands. But the patient went on, staring at the glass cupboards with their shining knives and her whole body trembled.

“ Nothing will happen to you,” said the sister. “ Those instruments are for other operations.”

The trolley was pushed close up to the operating table, the attendant and the sister lifted the patient on their arms, and the trolley was wheeled away. The patient had already been given an injection of morphia-caffeine-atropine and camphor, and so she was a little dopy. She only sighed once or twice: The matron took off her nightgown, and the patient lay naked for a moment. The attendant directed the light of the scialitic lamp directly on her abdomen. Then, the patient's arms and legs were tied to the table with white straps, and a wire mask was put over her face with a white cloth on top.

“ Doctor ! ” she groaned. “ I'm frightened ! ”

From the next room, the surgeon, still scrubbing his hands, replied automatically : “ A trifle, a trifle ! ”

“ At the start, everything went off splendidly,” the assistant Rubinski recounted later. “ The apparatus was functioning faultlessly. When I had communicated with the superintendent by phone, I went back to a hundred and one and had the matron wakened, in view of the imminent operation. With us, the matron usually gives the anæsthetic. I myself had given the patient the pre-operational injection, and sat near her till she calmed down a little. Never have I seen anyone more frightened. She trembled and kept asking why she was vomiting and

if the room smelt of petrol. Then I left her and went to the theatre to get myself ready for the operation. Soon after me the superintendent came in. I thought I would be assisting, as usual, but suddenly the lecturer appeared and began to prepare, too. I was rather glad about it, as I thought I'd have less trouble. And actually, everything seemed likely to be normal. I felt the superintendent was calm and in good form. The presence of the lecturer increased this confidence. When, after the fifteen minutes' prescribed washing of the hands I went into the operating-theatre, the patient was already lying under the mask. The superintendent and the lecturer didn't exchange a single word. It was funny to look at them! That's routine for you! I began to arrange the sterile towels."

In a corner of the operating-theatre stood the attendant Paul, sharpening a razor. The patient was not yet quite under, so he warned her: "Don't be afraid, we're going to shave you," and he began shaving her belly.

The patient gave a strange shiver, the belly and the Venus hill trembled and it seemed to the attendant, without knowing why, that he was caressing his own wife.

"Ready! Ready!" shouted the surgeon from the first room, and the lecturer answered: "Yes." They washed their hands in alcohol, then held them up in the air and stood for a moment in this attitude, with uplifted hands like priests at prayer.

"Ready!" shouted surgeon Tamten in a dry, peremptory tone. And then the first drop of ether fell on the mask and the attendant Paul pulled the sterilised aprons out of the steriliser with forceps.

The patient's legs were covered with a sheet, her chest, too, and only the naked belly was to be seen. The matron sat on a stool at the head, holding the patient's face with

one hand and a bottle of ether in the other from which ether was trickling, drop by drop. There was a strong, sickening smell, and in the next room the attendant pulled out the gauze masks. He put one over the lecturer's face, fixed it at the back of his neck, and then only his quiet, blue eyes could be seen through a narrow slit.

Medico Rubinski looked by chance through the open door and, on catching sight of the lecturer, thought: "Whom does he remind me of? Ah, he's like Chopin." But at this moment, the surgeons again raised their hands and the attendant began tying their apron strings behind them. Then the surgeons drew on big, rubber gloves.

The patient was breathing heavily and started choking. The sister held her jaw firmly; suddenly the patient began to writhe and twist. Everything was quiet. And all at once, strange sounds coming from the patient's belly filled the room.

"Wow! Wow! Wow!" she barked loudly, like a dog.

"Breathe easily, please!" shouted surgeon Tamten from the next room.

"Wow! Wow! Wow!"

The matron pressed the wire-net mask covered with cotton-wool soaked in ether more firmly on the patient's nose and mouth, and said calmly: "Quiet, quiet."

The patient barked again, she seemed to want to tear herself off the operating table, then suddenly she stretched out her whole body and stiffened.

"I'm generally quite used to the painful scenes preceding an operation," said Rubinski, "but this time, I remember, the barking made a singularly unpleasant impression on me. In spite of myself, I was afraid the patient was dying, though I knew this wasn't the case. However, the surgeon and the lecturer were as imperturb-

able as mummies. This quietened my nerves at once. I say again, everything seemed likely to go off splendidly, and the idea would never have entered my head that such a thing could happen at the eighth minute. There was an atmosphere of complete serenity and confidence. Only one detail surprised me. Through the door I saw the superintendent throw a glance at the patient lying on the table, and then turn suddenly towards the lecturer, to whom he said something. It was brief, but I felt they'd noticed something extremely interesting. After a moment, both entered the operating-theatre wearing their masks."

The surgeon was completely master of himself, somewhat passive, as before every operation. He took no interest in the patient at all. He became part of a machine which he himself had put in motion during many long years ; he felt himself a precisely working instrument. He was one of those unusually steady surgeons, always sure of themselves, who never lose their heads or grow excited during an operation. None of his assistants could recall a single case when he had abused anyone or flown into a passion. On the contrary, in the most critical moments, he was exaggeratedly polite and almost elegant. He never uttered an unpleasant word, at most he would say with a delicate impatience: "Dear doctor, hand me that quicker, for heaven's sake," or something of that sort.

Nothing could throw him off his professional balance. That was why, later on, surgeon Tamten always recalled the eighth minute with disgust. "I was as sure of my sang-froid as an engine-driver climbing on to the locomotive he has known for thirty years. But, through the open door, I saw the patient's belly, and I was rather upset as I found myself for the first time considering a naked body, not as a doctor, but as a man. That cursed line of the belly ! "

Surgeon Tamten turned and said to the lecturer: "Look, look!"

The lecturer replied in German: "Oh, yes!" and he, too, looked for a moment at the naked belly of the woman lying on the operating-table. The line of the belly was really lovely and disturbing. But its beauty vanished at once from the two doctors' eyes, and both saw before them no more than a part of patient hundred and one's body which had to be operated on for appendicitis.

Flapping his galoshes on the tiled floor, the surgeon entered the operating-theatre, while lecturer von Fuchs slipped in behind him. The matron said: "She's just gone off, doctor."

Then surgeon Tamten turned grave, and looking at the abdomen, he asked: "What's the minute? Please make a note of it."

The sister replied: "Sixteen minutes past two, doctor."

So, at two-sixteen, the patient was under. Medico Rubinski, with a precise movement, painted the right side of the abdomen with iodine, and then put sterile towels round it, fixing them with clips. At last, all that was left was an insignificant part of the body in the shape of a narrow rectangle. It was dark brown in colour. At two-sixteen and some seconds, surgeon Tamten said quietly: "Lancet."

He stood bending over the patient's right side, lecturer von Fuchs was on the left, and medico Rubinski passed the instruments. Rubinski quickly handed the lancet and the lecturer caught a retractor in mid-air as adroitly as a juggler. The instruments gleamed coldly.

"Lower the legs," said the surgeon, and at once the

attendant Paul sprang up and gently pushed on the lever of the operating-table.

The operating machine, composed of five men, was definitely under way, working with precision and without error. The operator and his assistants were fused in some strange, unique being, in a kind of monster, a hydra with five heads and ten hands, whose every movement was perfectly calculated and mathematically co-ordinated. There was not a single unnecessary movement and everything went on oiled wheels. The surgeon was going to say: "Lower the patient's head, too," but his wish was at once divined by the sister and the attendant who, at the same moment, pushed the other lever of the table. The lecturer made a movement of approbation with his shoulders. In its infallible precision the work seemed likely to be a pleasure, it roused a sort of artistic inspiration.

The first cut opened the skin and a layer of fat, which was immediately covered with blood.

"Gauze," said the surgeon, but without waiting, Rubinski had already passed the gauze to the lecturer, who at once wiped the wound.

The surgeon's hands were already in blood. With his forceps, Doctor Tamten threw the gauze towards the pail into which it fell with a splash. In the wound several blood vessels could be seen from which blood was running.

"Artery forceps," said the surgeon. He caught a blood vessel with the forceps, and the lecturer, without looking, took a thread from Rubinski's hand and tied the vein, stopping the blood. Then, with shining retractors in the shape of little, bent rakes, he seized the two lips of the wound and widened it.

"Knife," said the surgeon in a monotonous voice, and he cut through the next layer, where the lecturer

immediately thrust another gauze. The surgeon threw the blood-soaked gauze into the pail.

The peritoneum was already visible. The wound was nearly three inches long and a pinkish violet. Again the surgeon closed the blood vessels with his forceps; the forceps and the heavy retractors, hanging on either side of the wound, clicked at every movement. The lecturer stretched the wound still further apart with his retractors, and the surgeon said: "Scissors."

Rubinski passed the scissors with one hand and with the other held threads ready. The peritoneum was already open and the yellowish, violet intestines gleamed weakly. The surgeon threw aside two soiled forceps and the scissors, and the attendant caught them in mid-air and put them in the steriliser.

The hydra with five heads and ten arms was moving in faultless rhythm. The course of the operation was extraordinarily favourable in every detail. The surgeons' fingers, like twenty mobile antennae, darted with dazzling precision. The patient's breathing was deep and regular. The matron had already poured out half the bottle of ether. In the next room, the attendant was preparing instruments quietly.

The theatre was sparkling with electric light, white and penetrating. Everything was white with the exception of the surgeons' gowns and hands, which were crimsoned with blotches of bright blood.

"How many minutes?" asked the surgeon in a level voice.

"Eight, doctor," answered the matron, and the surgeon widened the wound and put his hand into the patient's entrails.

It was then that something unexpected happened, terrifying in its suddenness.

Rubinski noticed that at the upper part of the nose,—for, with the mask, only the eyes and a small portion of the nose could be seen,—at the upper part of the surgeon's nose a drop of sweat stood out suddenly. At the same moment, the lecturer bent quickly over the wound, surgeon Tamten raised his head and looked at the lecturer, who appeared to have guessed.

"Heavens, what a business!" he said quietly.

On the surgeon's nose appeared a second drop of sweat, his nose turned red, and the surgeon said in German, his voice altered and toneless, as if he were stifling:

"That's the third time I've seen that . . ."

Then he exclaimed:

"Ein-ge-kap-selt!"

"Oh, jawohl!" whispered the lecturer.

There was a moment of anxiety and amazement, and this anxiety, having exploded like an electric spark in surgeon Tamten, ran through the matron and the attendant. Then, everything went wrong at once. The operative mechanism began working out of rhythm, like a motor out of order. Surgeon Tamten regained his self-control in the twinkling of an eye, he was once more quiet and sober, but it was already too late.

"Scissors," said the surgeon in an absorbed voice. With a feverish movement, Rubinski handed him forceps, the patient began rattling in the throat, the surgeon hurled the forceps at Rubinski's head and said: "B——!"

The forceps fell to the tiled floor with a clatter, the patient was groaning and choking. The surgeon said to the matron: "Make the patient breathe quietly, will you?"

The matron turned scarlet to the ears and opened her mouth. There was not a drop more ether in the bottle, the reserve jar had vanished.

"Scissors," repeated the surgeon in an absorbed voice. With a trembling hand, Rubinski clumsily held out forceps. The surgeon hurled them at his head, and for the second time said : " B—— ! "

Suddenly, the patient's abdomen began to heave, her chest as well. She began barking again : " Wow ! Wow ! " and the matron had not a drop more ether within reach.

The surgeon slowly turned his masked face towards her. His nose was quite damp, and he stressed every syllable as he said : " The pat-ient- must- go- on- breathing ! "

The lecturer, who divined everything, brought out coldly : " Ether ! "

The attendant, who was getting instruments ready in the next room, had the idea he was needed, and ran into the operating-theatre.

" There's no ether ! " said the matron, nearly in tears.

" Sterilised instruments at once ! " said Tamten.

The attendant lost his head, he could not find the bottle of ether anywhere, and the water was not boiling in the steriliser yet.

" Scissors," repeated the surgeon for the third time. He threw a glance at the matron, whose eyes were starting as she sat, and said drily : " Pull the tongue out ! " At the same moment, Rubinski slipped a knife into his hand. The surgeon hurled this with all his might over Rubinski's head, shouting : " B—— ! "

Then, swift and supple, the lecturer elbowed Rubinski aside ; without looking, almost, he seized the scissors from the little table and handed them to the surgeon. Tamten slit the wound with the scissors and lengthened it, while the lecturer said tenderly : " Oh, jawohl ! "

The matron said afterwards that fear had utterly deprived her of any power of movement. "It was the first time I had heard the surgeon use a bad word during an operation. But I was already filled with anxiety before that. I don't know what happened during that eighth minute. I was so frightened, I lost my memory. I didn't know what I ought to do. Then, as if from far away, I heard the patient choking, perhaps on the point of waking. I utterly forgot what should be done in such cases. I only pressed the mask desperately on the patient's face and held the ether bottle over her head, and it wasn't until after a minute that I noticed there wasn't any more ether. I couldn't so much as utter a word to call the attendant. Worst of all, I didn't know where the reserve bottle was. The attendant came running up to give it to me, then, not finding it, and without knowing why, he went galloping back to the instruments being boiled. It was the beginning of an absolute nightmare!"

The attendant actually carried on for a while like a man possessed. "What's happened to the superintendent?" he stuttered. He was in a paroxysm of terror, for the water in the steriliser would not boil at any price. "I'm bringing them at once, I'm bringing them at once," he kept on saying, looking desperately to see whether bubbles were showing on the water. But the surface of the water was calm.

"I even wanted to chuck everything up and run out into the corridor," he said afterwards. "And especially when, through the doorway, I saw the knife go whizzing past Rubinski's head; he was red and white by turns, and the matron with her mouth gaping was a pitiful sight."

"Sterilised instruments!" said the surgeon in a dry, imperious tone. "Pull the tongue out!" But neither the attendant nor the matron could understand anything.

"I thought I was going mad," said the matron. "What had to be done with the tongue? and what tongue? Everything was mixed up in my head. For an instant, I wanted to pull out my own tongue and show him. It was as if we were all crazy."

The house-surgeon, Rubinski, had the same impression. "The matron was bewildered. She looked like a sparrow that's died with its beak open. I was all at sea. I distinctly heard the surgeon say 'Scissors,' I knew where they were, and yet, in spite of everything, I took up forceps. My hands were shaking and every one of the instruments seemed dreadfully heavy to me. What happened next I can hardly remember at all. I was painfully divided in myself. On the one hand I felt I had to do this and that, on the other I kept wondering with a morbid curiosity what had happened, and why the surgeon had been so upset during the eighth minute. My curiosity was unhealthy, I felt that myself, it was like an 'idée fixe.' One thing more, I know the lecturer shouldered me aside and passed the scissors himself. Like some unconcerned spectator, I gazed at the wound, and I remember that once I wanted to take a look at the interior of the abdomen, but I didn't manage to as the surgeon and the lecturer immediately, and as if on purpose, covered the whole operating field with their fingers. Then I kept staring at their hands like a cretin. Ideas without any coherence at all ran through my mind. I thought that the superintendent's fingers were well shaped, strong and agile as a monkey's. Yes, he really had monkey's hands.

"In contrast, the lecturer's fingers, long, slender, artistic, recalled those of a musician. I thought again stupidly that he was like Chopin, and that when he moved his fingers, it was as if he were playing a very complicated

piece of music. I couldn't see anything else but these fingers. Then the patient started choking.

" 'The tongue!' snarled the surgeon.

" I saw the sister's anxiety and could understand her state of mind. I also guessed that something had occurred which she couldn't prevent. She held the patient's head with one hand and with the other she was searching about for something on the floor. The attendant threw me a distracted look, and I saw that in his terror he was handling sterilised instruments, and would therefore be obliged to take them back to the steriliser. Everything was upside down. But the most appalling and difficult moment of all came when a stream of blood poured gushing out of the interior of the wound.

" 'Artery forceps,' said the superintendent, without raising his head.

" I hadn't any more sterilised forceps. My hands flew over the little table in vain. I made a sign to the attendant, and Paul hit the steriliser with his fists in desperation so that it reverberated.

" 'Artery forceps,' repeated the surgeon, in his normal, calm voice, and that gave me a little courage. But it was no good, there wasn't the smallest pair of forceps to hand."

" Wow! Wow!" barked the patient. It looked as if she were going to start up. Then the lecturer let go of his retractor with one hand and pushed the mask off his face with his elbow.

" Open the mouth!" he said in German. Thank God, the matron understood at that, and pulled the lower jaw down with her fingers. At the same moment, blood gushed out like a fountain from the interior of the abdomen. The lecturer thrust in a gauze. Again Tamten repeated, " Forceps!" but there were none.

With his long, subtle fingers, the lecturer drew out the blood-soaked gauze, threw it down, and thrust a fresh gauze into the wound : at the same instant, something unexpected and dreadful happened again.

Surgeon Tamten lifted his head and suddenly, in a shrill, dreadful, inhuman voice, so piercing that patients on the ground floor could hear it, he howled till the place re-echoed :

“ Artery for-or-orceps ! ”

It was like a thunderclap. At once, everything changed. The matron, who was saying her prayers, divined that it was the patient's tongue which had to be pulled out. The patient sighed deeply with relief. The matron saw the bottle of ether at her feet and picked it up immediately.

“ More ether ! ” thundered the surgeon. But the sister had already taken the stopper out of the bottle, and the drops were falling on the mask again. At the same time, the water in the steriliser began to boil, and the attendant came running in with instruments. Rubinski had suddenly noticed clean forceps on the table in front of him, and threw them straight into the surgeon's hands.

“ How many minutes ? ” cried surgeon Tamten. He seized a blood-vessel with the forceps, the lecturer made a surgical knot, the forceps clicked. The patient's lower jaw dropped, a swollen, greyish tongue came out on to the chin ; then the sister covered the face with a towel again and said with difficulty :

“ Twelve, doctor.”

“ Get a deep speculum ready ! ” the surgeon called across the theatre. He added :

“ Stop jittering, or I'll bash your jaw ! ”

Completely subservient to his will, Rubinski was already laying out new instruments briskly : “ We were

all moving like sleepwalkers, as if hypnotised. Without the least noise. But we were already calmer for, with that yell, he'd really muzzled us. I handed him the instruments without making any mistake, and kept throwing glances at the wound, but unfortunately, I couldn't see anything. I understood that some complications had arisen, and that it was no longer a question of the appendix, so I came to the conclusion that we were operating on the genital organs. The superintendent felt about in the ovaries, first on the right, then on the left side. I was exhausted and could hardly keep on my feet. I remember the surgeon shouted again at the top of his voice :

“ ‘ How many minutes ? ’ ”

“ ‘ Thirty-five, doctor. ’ ”

“ The lecturer glanced at the patient's chest, which had a very regular movement, and said :

“ ‘ Oh, we can . . . ’ ”

“ ‘ More ether ! ’ ordered the superintendent. Then, as if exhausted and excited at once, he shouted with a final effort that gave me goose-flesh :

“ ‘ Wipe the nose ! ’ ”

“ I understood what was meant, but I was terrified wondering if the attendant understood. He was capable of dashing forward and wiping the patient's nose. Luckily, however, he grasped what had to be done, and as the superintendent turned his face to one side a moment, he wiped his forehead and the upper part of his nose with a handkerchief. The attendant said that the handkerchief was soaked in a trice, just as if it had been held under a tap.”

“ How many minutes ? ” roared surgeon Tamten.

“ Forty-three, doctor.”

The surgeon's face was bent right over the wound, the

lecturer thrust a spoon into the intestines, and in the midst of a stream of blood and clots, the surgeon saw the appendix in front of him, matted together with the ruptured tube.

"Pulse?" he cried.

"Sehr gut! . . ."

"More ether!" and the surgeon brought a handful of blood clots out of the abdomen. He threw them on the floor.

"Excellent," said the lecturer coolly, and the surgeon howled:

"How many minutes?" His voice was hoarse.

"Fifty-one, doctor."

"Suture of the peritoneum."

The instruments clicked, Rubinski threaded a semi-circular needle, the lecturer grasped it with forceps. A pair of artery forceps shut with a metallic sound.

"Stop the anæsthetic!" cried the surgeon, and he fixed the first suture in position.

It was seven minutes past three in the morning.

"It's difficult for me to judge whether it was really only a bleeding cyst or a tumour, as the superintendent explained to me later," Rubinski related. "During the whole period of the operation from the eighth minute onwards, I couldn't see the operating field. I wanted to have a look once or twice, but every time either the lecturer or the surgeon hid everything from me with their hands. I remember now that Tamten and Fuchs said something else in German, but so fast and in such an incomprehensible way, that I couldn't grasp what it was about.

"All in all, except for that fear and tension, it had

been a real pleasure to see them. Their fingers were so supple and so controlled, they worked with such rhythm that it seemed to me the whole time they were not performing an operation, but playing a duet on a kind of blood-stained keyboard. When they had fixed the last suture, they looked at each other in embarrassment, as if cloaking their mutual satisfaction.

"I took off their masks, and was aghast at the lecturer's pallor. He looked like a corpse.

" ' Ah, what a job ! ' said the superintendent.

" ' Oh, jawohl ! . . . ' and for the first time I saw the lecturer smile. In course of time a strange relationship to their profession arises among such men. I had the feeling they were both mortally tired, but happy. The superintendent began humming something in his usual, frivolous way. In a second, he'd applied the dressing "

It was stiflingly hot in the operating theatre. The matron was still trembling from nervous exhaustion. The patient groaned softly in her sleep. Rubinski wanted to open the window, but the surgeon said : " You mustn't, you mustn't, the gentleman might catch cold ! " and he indicated the lecturer.

The trolley was brought in, the sister and the attendant laid the patient on it. Rubinski noticed that the surgeon gazed at the dark face with a profound interest. The trolley went out. The doctors washed their hands in silence. Then they went out into the corridor, and walked quickly along in step, surgeon Tamten with his elastic, feline gait, and lecturer von Fuchs swimming through the air like a spectre. Their gowns rustled. When they had reached his flat, the surgeon brought some cognac out of the cupboard, and the lecturer put on pyjamas. The surgeon drank several tots and said :

“ When you’re doing a trepan, you must have the brain in your head ; when you’re operating on a woman, you must have the genitals in your head ! ”



The tempest had been raging over the town for four successive days.

Widmar went sneaking home. Chaos reigned in his mind. All he had learned in the course of the last three days was mixed in an extraordinary jumble of images and impressions. The diary of Sophia Dubilanka with whom, he thought, he had no further tie, the operation, Tamten, the tailor, the window, Rebecca, made up an unbearable tangle.

He tried to co-ordinate his impressions. He divided them into past and present. To the past belonged what he knew of his wife's private life before the last two years. It was impossible to verify the litany of her supposed lovers' obscene names, but he could have forgiven her shameful past had he been certain that since their marriage she had been faithful to him. With this, however, the operation was in violent contradiction, and unfortunately it could not be included among things past. Moreover, with the present were connected such facts as her present uncontrollable way of life, Doctor Tamten, and the window about which the tailor talked so much.

Widmar decided to have a discussion with his wife in a way that he felt would be clever and cunning.

"I'll ask her first if she knew such and such men. Then, as if by chance, I'll surprise her with this question : 'You hid the exact course of your operation from me ! Don't hide the truth from me !' Lastly, I'll ask her if she knows, for instance, Oh, no, I won't do that for the time being !" He recalled Rebecca's accounts and sighed deeply. "Just what sort of an operation was

this?" he kept on saying. Since his marriage he had not been parted from his wife a single day, except for just those two months when business affairs had obliged him to stay in the capital. He had not returned until after the operation.

"Bungler!" he thought. "Sophia Dubilanka was right, wasn't she? I didn't live with my wife for nine weeks." After his return, he had not lived with her again, for she was not yet well. It was at this time that he made the acquaintance of surgeon Tamten, who came every other day to change the dressings. Then why, in front of him, did they treat the illness as a mere nothing? "I'll pay anything to know the truth!"

He entered the house and stood listening in the hall. But he did not hear the sound of any voices. He let himself into his room noiselessly. The windows were shut. The wind was roaring, it was difficult to breathe. Widmar thought, "It's going to rain." But, although clouds heavy with rain passed in mad course over the town, not a drop fell to the earth.

He did not want to make his presence known, and locked himself in. But at dinner-time, there was a knock at the door. "Come and have dinner," said his wife in a voice that seemed to him uneasy. "Aren't you feeling well? I saw you come in on the sly." Widmar came out.

"I really don't feel well," he said, "but it must be the wind."

He carefully avoided her look. Without lifting his eyes, he guessed she was smiling. "Why has she never stopped smiling since yesterday? We'll see who'll laugh last!" He sat down gloomily at the table, and ate in silence.

"What's this dish supposed to be?" he asked suddenly. His wife told him it was poularde.

"That kind of a hen?" he asked with sudden curiosity. "That kind of a hen."

At that moment, he looked like a madman. There was nothing amusing, either in the term or in the dish. "A poularde," he said to himself stupidly. "That's a hen that's been deprived of its femininity!" The tenour of his thoughts was given an unhealthy impetus, for this word "poularde" was linked in his mind with something so monstrously comic that he doubled over his plate and burst out laughing. He took no notice of his wife, he knew she was extremely annoyed. He dropped his fork and sat shaking over his plate, choking with laughter. "It's priceless! What an idea!"

"Very crisp, tender meat," he said, bursting with inward laughter. "Poor poularde."

It was the last time he ate of this dish. He was taken by such a physical horror of it after this dinner that at the mere thought of it he was nearly sick. "Nothing in the world will make me eat any more of this filthy stuff!" he thought suddenly, pushing his plate away. He had an ugly picture in his mind: he saw a hen covered in blood, whose feathers and down were being torn out. It had no apparent meaning, and perhaps it was, for this very reason, so revolting and disgusting. His crazy gaiety, if so it could be called, vanished not to return, a painful shudder shook him, and it was utterly impossible for him to rid himself of the vision of the blood-bespattered hen that obsessed him.

"I'm going to have some brandy," he said. He did not like alcohol and was not generally used to it. After the second glass, he found himself unexpectedly moved, as if a torrent of sentimentality were breaking its dykes and rushing ahead, laying waste everything in its path.

He had, luckily, forgotten the poularde, otherwise he would certainly have lost his balance completely.

"I've been very incautious," he thought. "As long as she hasn't noticed my abnormal excitement." He glanced at his wife and was reassured. Her features wore an expression of almost frozen indifference. He asked, as if mechanically :

"You remember that captain, what's his name, Andrew Rozjemczy ? "

She evinced no emotion, although he felt he had rather surprised her.

"There you are !" he triumphed. He heard her answer tonelessly that she had met Captain Rozjemczy in company somewhere or other, but she could not remember where.

"Ah ? " asked Widmar. For a moment he wanted to get up, take her unawares, grasp her tender neck and choke her until she confessed the whole truth.

But a strange thing, under the effect of alcohol, jealousy was changed into violent sensual desire.

A golden lamp was burning in an inverted shade, so that the ceiling alone was illuminated. Widmar lit a cigarette, looked sideways at his wife and said :

"I'll come to your room, because I have to talk to you."

"All right," she said, and her easy consent excited him the more. He followed her into the bedroom as if under a spell.

In bed he felt doubly intoxicated. Bent over his wife's face, he studied her familiar, beloved features, and was on the verge of the highest ecstasy when there flashed into his head: "She must have had the same smile and the same way, the same embrace for someone else"

This thought stifled his bliss immediately. He felt a

kind of psychical revulsion ; but as soon as the thought vanished, he was near happiness again. He wanted to cry ecstatically that he believed in her and forgave her. He saw her misty eyes and suddenly this unbidden thought sprang from his subconscious mind.

" And yet she's not experiencing anything at this moment, she's only observing me closely Why is she pretending ? "

He again had a feeling of revulsion, every contact was repugnant to him. The absolute certainty that his wife felt nothing, that she was wholly passive and only feigning happiness, made him impotent. However . . . Bent over her, he gazed at her shoulder, her face, her breast. He knew every inch of her skin by heart, and he was intoxicated again in the knowing of her beloved body.

A feeling of clear emptiness reigned in his head. He was sure the moment of delight was near, something shook him violently, but in the same instant he imagined the lower part of her belly, he distinctly saw something and uttered a groan of disgust. All sensual pleasure vanished at once. He lay beside his wife, depressed by his own inability. He heard her say: " You oughtn't to drink, it's bad for you." For the moment, he thought she was right, but then he realised that alcohol was not the cause of his sudden indifference. The reason lay elsewhere. He looked at her belly and touched her scar with his finger.

" Was it very painful, this tumour ? " he asked. And he asked another question : " Are you still putting on weight ? "

He was surprised that he realised this particular fact only now. Two years before, she had been slim, almost thin. For a year, that is since the operation, she had begun putting on weight, especially on the hips. He stroked the soft, mat skin of the scar with his finger and, without waiting for her answer, threw at her :

“ What did Doctor Tamten tell you the day after the operation ? ”

He stared at her with a dull, unmoving look and recalled Rubinski's account :

“ ‘ As to this tumour, I have grave doubts now,’ said the young assistant. ‘ I'm going to tell you one especially important fact. It's about this visit the superintendent paid at night to patient a hundred and one. I remember it very well, because it stuck in my head like a riddle. It already seemed to me then that the whole matter wasn't clear.

“ The day after the operation, the patient was lying in her private room. She still felt bad and kept vomiting continually ; she'd taken a long time to come round after the anæsthetic. I dropped into her room once or twice. She complained about the dressings covering her abdomen. ‘ They're very uncomfortable, I'll tear everything off ! . . . ’ Her nervous excitement naturally increased when, in the evening, another patient was put into her room. Our hospital was overcrowded. In the afternoon, a patient suffering from tuberculosis of the kidneys was brought in. We didn't know where to put her. So then the senior house-physician, Boguski, the one who's so terrified of cars, ordered her to be taken to a hundred and one. Your wife was most depressed about it.

“ ‘ My wife said nothing to you about this patient ? asked Widmar with a lively curiosity. He alone knew who this patient was. Who would have guessed that, by some strange stroke of fate, it was Sophia Dubilanka ? “ ‘ Nothing particular,’ replied Rubinski, ‘ she was only very angry. I must tell you, sick women are generally unbearable. They'll never tolerate another sick person near them. I calmed your wife down as well as I could.

“ ‘ But,’ I said to her, ‘ it’s only temporary ! Now, now, why work yourself up like this ? ’ Her neighbour was already asleep, but I don’t remember, perhaps she’d already been taken to another wing In any case I asked your wife whether the smell of petrol still bothered her. ‘ Oh, doctor ! ’ she cried, ‘ better not remind me of that ! ’

“ I went out. The corridor was dark. Night duty was beginning, I hurried to my room to have a rest. I had nearly reached my door when I heard a noise at the other end of the corridor. I looked, but couldn’t see anyone. Suddenly the superintendent leaned out from behind a cupboard. I recognised him in spite of the half-darkness, and was surprised at the mysterious way in which he appeared. I stopped and watched to see what would happen. After a moment, the superintendent came out from behind his cupboard, glanced round, and then with a quick, stealthy step, ran to the door of a hundred and one. He went in without knocking.

“ I was struck by this strange, nocturnal visit. I waited a bit, then went along to the room. The superintendent stayed there a very long while. ‘ He’s surely not putting on another dressing,’ I thought, ‘ there’s no sister there and none of the necessary materials. What can he be talking about all this time ? ’ Then I heard a few fragmentary sentences.

“ The surgeon was saying something like, ‘ If we’d operated two hours later who knows how it might have turned out I’m convinced now that you won’t be able to have a child.’

“ ‘ Ah ! So that’s what it was,’ I thought. The superintendent added something else, but I couldn’t hear. And then there was a noise in the room as if someone had moved a chair. I guessed the superintendent had

stood up. The door opened, I saw the room illuminated with a bluish light, the bedrail and the surgeon standing with his back to me. 'You can be quite easy in your mind,' he said, fumbling behind him for the door-handle. Then he added in a cold, almost official tone: 'I alone know about it, and my friend who operated on you with me, lecturer von Fuchs. Nobody besides ourselves will ever know anything . . .'

"Something like the hissing of a viper was heard in the room. 'Tss! Tss!' hissed a frightened voice. I turned on my heel. I'd already reached the end of the corridor when I saw the superintendent burst out of a hundred and one like a whirlwind. It was an interesting visit . . . I remember, too, that some time this same evening, it seems, the superintendent said to your wife, . . . 'What might the results be? It's difficult to foresee. In the majority of cases, it passes without any effects. However, if the second ovary should subsequently degenerate, there would of course be some repercussions: you'd have a tendency towards putting on weight.'"

Now, throwing a gloomy look at the scar, Widmar demanded obstinately:

"What did Doctor Tamten say to you the day after the operation?"

As always, the answer was unsatisfactory. He knew all her subterfuges by heart. First she pretended she couldn't remember anything. "Try to remember, anyway," he whispered as calmly as he could. Cold and taciturn, she said nothing. This silence was another prevarication.

Suddenly there was a terrible noise, the house was shaken, something fell on the roof with a crash, and a belated passer-by in the street shouted, "Catch my hat! . . ." The wind began hurling itself on the roof again with an explosive roar.

His wife sat up in bed. "I can't ever remember such weather," she said. It might have been imagined that this din had alarmed her, but Widmar had another explanation for her fright. "You can never remember anything," he said. "This time I can remind you."

He remarked with satisfaction that a shadow crossed her face. "The doctor came to you late in the evening to tell you that you hadn't had appendicitis."

"I don't understand," she said in a low voice.

"I've caught her at last!" thought Widmar, and added: "Why don't you understand? He told you that you'd had" (he relished the pause,) "that you'd had a tumour!"

He felt she was re-assured at once. "Not for long!" he thought with inward joy. "Oh, yes!" he affirmed. "It was you who told me so yourself. But," he went on, "why didn't you tell me surgeon Tamten warned you that you'd get fat? And does the smell of petrol still bother you nowadays?"

He imagined that he had utterly crushed her. But in that very moment, she slid her body against him and, having caught Widmar's look, held it.

"I don't remember," she said with a smile.

Her teeth sparkled, her lips were dry and red.

He understood in a flash that her power over him was boundless. An immense wave, a flood of tenderness submerged him and carried him into the open sea of her arms. "You love me, don't you? And you'll always love me? Won't you?"

"I love you!" she answered.

He believed it because he wanted to believe it. An extraordinary moment of torture and joy drew near,

the walls of the room were spinning, the bed was on the point of leaping into the air. But everything again came to nothing, for into his subconscious mind came slyly creeping this deadly, sobering thought: "She has certainly smiled the same way and said, 'I love you!' as well." Then Rubinski's words echoed: "'There wouldn't have been such a fuss about this operation if it had been only a tumour!'"

This time his revulsion was absolute. Then, as soon as his excitement had died down, he felt as though, for the first time, he were free of the influence of the beloved woman. She grew old before his eyes, she was horrible, mendacious. "I shall have to divorce her!" he thought. In front of him lay a kind of rosy, wooden coffin, full of lies and hypocrisy. He could break his head against it, but he would never know the truth!

His feeling for his wife then assumed another aspect, and from this moment he began loving with this other, reversed love. The process was this: deception and disappointment had broken down his original feelings, so that nothing was left except disillusionment and jealousy. Love then turned back on itself and grew enamoured of this very disillusion and suffering. "Love as I've loved," he thought, despairingly, "and encounter a dirty lie? Why not tell me the truth!" He knelt in front of her and decided to make a last effort.

There followed a painful, humiliating scene. Cajoling, sweet almost, he begged for a little word of truth, kissed her hands and feet. He knew he would have been reconciled to being her slave all his life could he have been assured for a brief spell, at least, of her love. No, that would still have been too little! If only he could have been assured that she would never lie to him! . . . "I can bear the whole truth!" he implored, "but confess it, Rebecca!"

"Will you answer me or not?" he cried at last, impatiently.

He had had enough of this begging. Jealousy of the first quality hurled him somewhere into space above this woman as silent as the tomb. His side began to swell, his heart to pound. "And today again she may have been there and received his kisses!"

With dishevelled hair and beard, Widmar sat on the edge of the bed, as on the edge of an abyss, and panted:

"Well, Rebecca, and what about this aborted child?"

Widmar hurled this question at his wife on a Tuesday, in the night. That day, before arriving home, he had had, as we know, a conversation with the medico Rubinski. They had met in the city park and stood beside the fountain, talking very loudly, almost shouting, as the wind stifled their words. Rubinski wore white tennis clothes and tan shoes. He had disproportionately long arms that reached almost to his knees, and a thin, veined neck on which swayed an ungainly head. On the very top of this was perched a straw hat which the medico held on with both hands. He had slightly squinting eyes, the right eye looked straight forward, the left veered somewhere to the side. Rubinski shouted:

"What I was most afraid of has happened!"

"What's that?"

"In a month my appointment at the hospital ends, and the superintendent warned me today that I should be dismissed. He gave me some idiotic reason!"

"Aha! . . ."

Rubinski fixed his right eye on Widmar while his left looked at the fountain. He twitched his little black moustache and exclaimed:

"You've no idea what I've put up with during this job. I'm glad, even, to be leaving the hospital! Now I shan't have to hide that I think the superintendent's a fool!"

A crowd of rust-coloured leaves fell on them from a tree. Holding on to his hat, Widmar cried:

"I sympathise with you! But were you able to have a look at the records?"

"There's nothing left of the history of the illness! All that's written My God, what a wind! All that's written is that in the course of the operation a tumour was found which was removed!"

"Damnation!"

A cloud of dust whirled round them and fled. There was not a soul in the park. There was only a white dog running along the alley, his long, shaggy coat ruffled by the wind.

"I can tell you openly," Rubinski almost howled, "that it's what is called in Latin . . . Let's go somewhere else, for it's impossible to talk in such a wind!"

"Eh?" shouted Widmar, who could hear nothing.

"In Latin it's called What a wind! Damn it all, what's happening?"

"What?" yelled Widmar at the top of his voice.

"I say: *extra-uterina*!"

"*Extra-uterina*?"

"Yes! . . *extra-uterina*; *extra-uterine pregnancy*! . . ."

The wind stopped for a moment, to begin again so suddenly and with such violence that Widmar staggered on his feet.

"What's the matter with you?" shouted Rubinski.

"Nothing! It's the wind!" he replied. He counted:

" I was away nine weeks, for nine weeks I didn't live with her. It's all clear now."

" At the same time, it could have been a bleeding cyst ! " Rubinski went on shouting. " But taking everything into consideration, it was a pregnancy first and foremost. It's easy enough to make a mistake in diagnosis. An extra-uterine pregnancy sometimes gives rise to the same symptoms as appendicitis, and often presents itself without any specific symptom, that's to say without hæmorrhage. There's only a vague pain in the side, then when nausea, fainting and vomiting come, they can be like the signs of acute appendicitis, more especially as the temperature rises, and in this case there must be an immediate operation. It was a really lucky chance that we were able to do it ! Over and above all this, there were various characteristic details. For instance, this loathing of the smell of petrol, although there wasn't any in the room. Such whims are typical of pregnant women ! "

" Could you swear to me " began Widmar, but the wind blew on the fountain and a cascade of water inundated the talkers. They were soaked from head to foot. The medico sprang aside.

" What a bath ! , Let's go ! "

It was terribly hot. When they left the park they saw a notice-board lying on the pavement. A large green poster suddenly came unstuck and, carried away by the wind, went flying over the roof of a two-storeyed house. Widmar seized Rubinski's arm.

" Can you swear to me that it really was like this ? "

The medico pulled his arm away almost roughly. He looked at Widmar with his squinting eye, and said evasively :

"Unfortunately, I can't! These are only my suppositions!"

"Which means to say?" and Widmar took his arm again.

They mingled with the passers-by, but everyone was running along the street, driven by the wind, and nobody took any notice of them. All except a little old man in tussore silk jacket and trousers who came out of a door and jostled Rubinski in passing.

"Ah?" said Rubinski. "It's you, doctor?"

It was, in fact, the house-physician Boguski, ill-shaven, with two days' growth of silvery beard on his cheeks. The old doctor apologised and greeted them.

"Good morning, doctor . . . good morning, sir. What awful weather, isn't it? I've noted eighteen hæmorrhages in town today, myself! I'm just running off to another patient A wind like this . . . it's disastrous for consumptives."

Doctor Boguski was going to cross the road, when he drew back quickly on to the pavement.

"My God!" he exclaimed.

Roaring along at full throttle, a racing car with a big hood tore down the road at top speed. The old man waved his stick at it in a threatening gesture. He broke into a cold sweat and shivered. "You see, gentlemen, it only missed running me over by a hair's breadth! A devilish invention, these cars!" and the doctor, looking carefully to left and right, cautiously crossed the road.

Widmar seized Rubinski's arm and asked:

"What does it mean?"

"It means," replied the medico, "that these are hypotheses. But, in fact, it's also very possible it might have been a tumour as well, and except for certain suspicions I've no proof to assert that it wasn't."

"Could you please tell me," asked Widmar, "whether such an operation usually entails any consequences?"

"In the majority of cases, it leaves no traces," explained Rubinski conscientiously, "but I can't shout any more in such a wind!"

Leaves went flying down the street with bits of paper and columns of dust; tin-sheeted roofs were groaning and grinding. From off the roof of a white building several storeys high, situated at the end of the town, red tiles went flying. The medico, stooping towards Widmar's face, yelled at the top of his voice:

"After the extraction of one ovary, it may happen that the second degenerates if it was already unhealthy. This may at the time result in sterility and later, in far-reaching changes in the psychical life and above all, in the sex life These are usually very rare cases, though still quite possible However, to tell you the truth, I'm not in the position to give you an exact explanation"

Rubinski coughed, spat, and it was clear he was again dissatisfied with himself. He went on still more evasively:

" In the course of the operation they could have come on an ordinary tumour or on God knows what and the hæmorrhage might have sprung from an entirely different cause That's all"

Rubinski's errant eye suddenly saw in front of it Widmar's large, pink ear. It was covered with a short, grey down, and seemed to him like an independent being, with a personal life of its own. It seized avidly on every bit of information, and Rubinski's words filtered in there as if into pink cotton wool. This ear filled Rubinski with sudden aversion. "Why am I telling all that?" he thought angrily.

"I'm in a hurry," he said, and made off. To his great relief, Widmar did not hold him back. He only watched him go, frowning. Medico Rubinski made his way rapidly towards the hospital. All his life Widmar was to remember how his silhouette appeared from behind. He remembered quite automatically that big head, swaying on its thin neck, and those pointed shoulders, one of which was higher than the other. He remembered the white sports clothes and tan shoes, although neither Rubinski's appearance nor his apparel interested him at all. What he did find absorbing was something quite different:

"All that's nothing, nothing," he rubbed his hands, "tomorrow, or at the latest the day after tomorrow, I shall know everything." He did not feel the least pang of conscience; with every step it was proving true that humiliation in love, as it were, heightens the emotions.

That same night, after the seemingly decisive conversation with his wife, he could no longer endure balancing on the demarcation line separating humiliation from love.

"Well, Rebecca, and what about this aborted child?"

She was silent, composed, without a shade of embarrassment.

"Why did I say that?" he wondered regretfully. After a long interval his wife answered that she really did not know what he was asking about.

"You don't understand again?" He was boiling with rage. Suddenly, obeying a morbid prompting, he explained all his medical information to her. He spoke in a very general fashion, however, and cautiously. The result of a certain illness or operation could render a woman sterile for life. Then he recollected the dinner and the dish that had made him laugh so much.

"A woman after such an operation can't love!" he shouted.

He stood up quickly and wanted to rush to his room, but suddenly stopped on the threshold.

This resulted from the fact that, after so many days of this ancient disease whose name is jealousy, his organism was a prey to ordinary physical reaction. His nervous system, squandering his emotional energy with prodigality, was like an accumulator that has run down. If at this very moment Widmar had even caught his wife "in flagranti" he would have been incapable of conjuring up his former indignation. Who knows whether he would have believed his own eyes.

The well-being of the human system is founded on a lie. The only real cure, the one to which man is driven by nature herself, is self-delusion. In a swift, hypocritical way, unperceived by Widmar, the lie clouded his memory, and here was Widmar clearly seeing that Rebecca had never betrayed him, and that up to this day she had been faithful to him. For an instant, he saw his wife as she had been a few weeks before. He saw her beautiful, calm face with its truthful eyes, its indulgent, loving smile. With such eyes and such a smile, it is not possible to lie!

"Everything goes on much more simply in the world," affirmed Widmar hastily, so as to complete his own self-deception. "I've been living in a world of imaginary terrors. Among normal people, nobody experiences such things!" His wife's bedroom, which before that he had hated so much, stopped being hostile and malevolent. He knew all the objects in this room so well, and was too sure of their indifference to suspect the old rosewood bed, for example, of treachery or deception. The deceitful simplicity of the things and

phenomena surrounding him misled him. It seemed impossible to him that, in this peaceful setting, events terrifying in their illusion might occur.

This state of affairs could be explained by simple lassitude. Widmar was exhausted to such a degree by all his uncertainty and self-excitement that at present he lacked the strength to continue not believing. It would have been a hundred times easier to do as so many others do in similar cases, that is, to shut his eyes. For an instant he gave way to this tempting weakness. His hands hung loosely down the side of his pyjamas, his head fell on his breast, while above his head, above the ceiling and the roof, the tempest raged.

He stood at the door and looked towards the bed in a state of complete indecision. It lasted a short time. It was as if the burning wind invaded Widmar's skull, singeing his sluggish brain, and here arose the picture of the disgusting dish.

Widmar breathed with more and more difficulty. He grasped his left side, his heart grew cold and turned over in his thorax with a dreadful slowness. Widmar looked at his wife, and then threw in her face like a lump of mud :

“ Poularde ! ”

He experienced a shocking satisfaction and a kind of delight in his own shamelessness. He was proud of not having yielded to a disarming credulity, and of having been able to preserve his clarity of thought. “ Nothing's so simple, and nothing's so clear,” he now thought, “ everything seems simple and clear only when one's mind is confused. Every woman lies in wait for such a moment. Every woman knows that a man reaches the limit of his jealousy and that, in obedience to some vital law of self-preservation, he grows credulous, rejects every

suspicion, tramples every clue underfoot, so as to put an end to his suffering as soon as possible. Then the woman can do what she likes with him ! ”

He ran quickly out of the room, growling :
“ Poularde ! Poularde ! ”

He knew there would be a scene in the house : his wife would probably burst into tears and then, beside herself, come shrieking to his study.

“ What’ll happen then ? ” he wondered. His imagination failed him, but then there rose in his imagination a spectre so threatening, so redolent of death that he tried to forget it.

He pulled Sophia Dubilanka’s memoirs out of his bureau, and for the first time had a feeling of gratitude towards the dead woman. He even felt a longing after her shade that was surely watching over him in the life beyond the grave since she had sent him the diary. He ran through the pages and, his ears pricked in the expectation of some catastrophe, digested the pitiless contents. To his great vexation, his wife did not come running in. He experienced a slight disappointment, as if he regretted that the longed-for dénouement had not happened after all. He heard neither weeping nor approaching footsteps. He heard only the wind blowing, the creaking of tree-trunks in the garden, the noise of falling objects and an incessant sound like gunfire. “ It’s like out hunting ! ” he thought mechanically, and glanced at the gun hanging above the settee.

He gazed at the black barrels and repeated :

“ Why hasn’t she come ? Is she afraid ? ”

But his wife lay curled up in bed, her hand under her head, and slept peacefully.

The moon had not shown itself that night, for clouds

covered the whole sky. At the end of the city, the gale fell on a little wood of spruces and hurled itself at them all night, so that in the morning uprooted trees and branches could be seen scattered all over the countryside. In a mad sweep, the wind threw itself to the other end of the city and there, in the courtyard of a white building several storeys high, it began whirling with a savage, ungovernable fury. It shook the entrance gate, and started to pound on it with shafts of yellow sand and dust. Through this gate came several men and women in white, struggling against the wind ; it threw rubbish, leaves and sand at them, but in spite of it all, the people in white crossed the courtyard rapidly and disappeared inside the building.

That morning there were hardly any pedestrians in the streets. More and more violent, the fiery, burning wind flew along the pavements at a dizzying speed, destroying in its path everything weak or wavering, sweeping the pavements and driving before it columns of dust and rubbish.

This windy morning tailor Gold opened the door on to the porch, but he shut it again as fast as possible and forbade the children to go out. In spite of the abominable, stifling weather, Widmar went staggering about the town all day, impatiently waiting for the evening. He had stuffed Sophia Dubilanka's diary into his waistcoat pocket.

The story of Widmar's meeting with his future wife, the story of his marriage and his love were scrupulously described in the memoirs of the mistress Widmar had loved for many years, and who had died a year before in All Saints' hospital. Except for a few literary alterations, the extracts from the diary read more or less as follows :

" Widmar and I were at the cinema. They were

giving *The White Devils*. Then something happened to which, until this day, I can't reconcile myself. I remember we'd gone in a little too early. They were showing advertisements on the screen, which Widmar simply can't bear. 'They keep the public there like a flock of sheep,' he would say in a fury, 'and force you to look at things that have no interest for anybody.' He was particularly exasperated that evening. I stroked his hand and said something funny to him, it does him good when I laugh. But then he looked at me with an almost inimical eye, and I could feel my features freezing. It amused me a little, and annoyed me a little, too, but I was still a long way from the idea that he might leave me. Yes, I was much too sure of him. And perhaps, just because I was beginning to love him more than he did me, I was ceasing to have any power over him, and I lost my head.

"So I told myself that he knew about this, perhaps, and was perhaps thinking about it, but I was reassured because it was impossible, and I could always have proved to him that it wasn't so."

This last sentence, like many others of the same kind, seemed to Widmar devoid of all meaning. "Women's tittle-tattle!" he thought, "it's impossible to understand anything!"

"'The best thing will be to take no more notice of him,' I decided. A perfectly idiotic comedy began, but it amused me and I kept laughing the whole time.

"'Why are you laughing like that?' he asked me.

"He spoke very calmly, but there was something in his voice that disquieted me, I couldn't make out what it was. I answered bitterly that if I annoyed him I could go, or something similar, but I noticed all at once that Widmar was looking towards the entrance.

There were about a dozen people at the entrance who were late. Several women were there, but I immediately guessed which one he was looking at. She was standing with her profile towards us. Her fur-coat was open, and I saw the crepe-de-chine lining, as well as a bit of her orange-coloured dress, cut low at the breast in a narrow triangle.

“ This woman was almost ugly, and old into the bargain, without any charm. But I felt she would be attractive to men, and I saw that Widmar was looking at her. I didn’t show I’d noticed, only I stopped laughing. I attached no importance to it in my mind. I knew for certain that Widmar couldn’t live without me, I couldn’t imagine it being otherwise.

“ Suddenly, this woman turned in our direction, glanced somewhere over our heads, saw some vacant seats in our row and began making her way towards us. The way in which she walked, in which she pushed, rather, seemed to me simply brazen. She went heaving among people as if among the branches of some inoffensive bushes, even elbowing everyone aside without ceremony. When a few men and women were in her path, I thought with strange relief that she wouldn’t be able to manage it. It was so for a moment. She disappeared in a crowd of men’s coats, but reappeared immediately after. She emerged unexpectedly on the surface, like a diver, and was already swimming straight towards us with an undulating movement, first of the left, then of the right shoulder. She looked exactly like a professional swimmer. In spite of myself, I looked at her legs ; they were long and pretty, but I felt mine were better shaped.

“ Meanwhile, this woman had come near us, she

passed quite close and didn't so much as glance at me. She only said, 'Pardon me!' but in such an irritated voice that it seemed as if we ought to ask her pardon for being in her way. She had a low voice and talked through her nose as if she had a cold. I repeat, she didn't so much as glance at me, and it made me furious. And yet I knew for certain she was studying me the whole time, just as I was her. I felt it distinctly.

"However it was, this woman went swimming past us, bumping me with her round, warm knee. Widmar stood up so that she could get by more comfortably, I thought it was a good thing he had stood up, as she couldn't touch him with her knee. Unfortunately, she brushed him with her breast.

"Afterwards, I pretended not to have noticed how he quivered. Then, during the interval when the lights went on, I brought out, almost mechanically :

" 'Did you see that woman? She must certainly be a swimmer She has a crooked shoulder.'

" 'Do swimmers have crooked shoulders?' he asked in surprise.

" 'I don't know,' I answered. 'In that case, she must be a typist.'

"He was very absent-minded and was obviously paying no attention to me at all. His eyes were fixed on the screen, but every now and then he kept turning his head to the left, so that I could see only his neck. In the half-light I could still make out his beard, which cut across the whiteness of his collar in a black blotch. Suddenly, he leaned forward and looked at the ground with such persistence that it made me uncomfortable.

" 'If the cinema doesn't amuse you, we can go,' I said drily, and stood up, but by some strange chance,

the lights went up at the same moment as there was something wrong with the film.

“ ‘But how on edge you are today!’ he said ironically, looking at the ground. I bent down, too, but as I’m short-sighted, I couldn’t see even a bit of the floor.

“ ‘What can you see there?’ I asked, yawning. A feeling of anxiety took possession of me. ‘Someone’s anxious for sure,’ I thought, and I had the presentiment that something unpleasant was about to happen. Perhaps it would have been better, really, to have left the cinema without waiting for the end of the film, which was spoilt and kept breaking off every minute. One could already hear hootings from the audience, and in the first row, someone started stamping his feet. I felt uncomfortable and imagined everybody felt the same.

“ ‘But whatever is it you can see there?’ I repeated, while he sat with his eyes riveted. He answered me quietly that he thought someone had lost a glove in passing. An ordinary skin glove.

“ The lights went out ; the projector began rattling again and a bluish beam sprang out above our heads. On the silver screen, skiers were coming down a slope at night in a storm. They were flying in panic before masses of clouds, throwing distracted glances behind them every moment, then, with a sickening speed, plunged into some abyss. Someone in the audience heaved a loud sigh and, as if it, too, were terrified, the music broke off for an instant. I remember I was deeply moved by this scene and by this mad race with the elements, but I was most terrified of all when the skiers, covered in snow from head to foot like real White Devils, came across the corpse of a woman in a snow drift.

"I forgot everything, and looked at the screen with mingled fear and curiosity, for I couldn't understand where this corpse came from. The woman lay half buried under the snow, her legs were shockingly spread and doubled up, her wind-jacket was unbuttoned at the breast, and a dreadful, black wound could be seen on her breast. One of the skiers lifted her beneath the shoulders, and, as is common in pictures, showed the audience a huge, frightened face. Then we saw them from high up again, as if we were sitting on a cloud. Next moment we were behind them, and could see the corpse. It was a terrible sight and I made a grimace of horror when I suddenly noticed that one shoulder was crooked

"I moved in my seat, I felt in an extraordinary state and wanted to press myself against Widmar. I stretched out my hand to catch hold of his sleeve, but in the darkness all I found was an empty place. I was sure he'd disappeared somewhere. Then the music, which was making a dreadful roar, stopped on a discord. Darkness filled the theatre and again nothing could be seen, not even the white cloth. 'Something's gone wrong again,' I thought and whispered 'Where are you?'

"Nobody answered me. The seat beside me was empty, all the people were leaving their places. 'What's happened? Why is it dark?' someone shouted. But already it was no longer dark. Just above us, in the operator's cabin, fire broke out, and in a moment the whole wall was ablaze. I screamed and began struggling among the seats. Someone pushed me with all their might and slipped past beside me, I knew it was a woman. I believe I called Widmar, but I couldn't make out any figures or any

faces. Everything was in confusion. Here were men's hands, there women's feet. Somebody threw a coat on me which made me stagger, and I fell with my chest on the back of a seat. Then, fortunately, all the doors were opened wide and the lights went up.

"The panic subsided for, in reality, there was no danger and one fireman in a helmet was enough to put the fire out. But nearly everyone had rushed to the exit.

"Widmar was waiting for me by an open door, and, as he usually does when he's in a bad temper, was calmly stroking his carefully tended beard. I threw myself on him and wanted to say something disagreeable and biting, but all at once this woman swam close past us.

"She went heaving among people in her brazen way. This time she was accompanied by several military men. From behind, her shoulders recalled those of the corpse.

" 'You certainly funked it !' I said to Widmar in an intentionally loud voice. Something constricted my throat and I felt like crying.

"He smiled at me mechanically, and I had the impression this smile was not intended for me. I was wrong, for this woman had already passed us by. Why did I ascribe so much importance to her ? I wondered and still, I remember, I was shivering. I remembered that someone had pushed me and that I'd knocked myself on a chair-back.

" 'Listen . . . ,' I began.

"He went on smiling. He took me by the arm and escorted me into the street. Under a street lamp stood a little group of people. It was raining, the pavements were glistening. The group, these same military men,

were probably waiting for a cab. In their midst I at once noticed this woman. What struck me above all was her gorgeous fur, which, at a distance, recalled a tiger's skin. I blinked my eyes to see better. She had big boots on her feet and as a result her legs looked like sticks.

"Suddenly, Widmar let go my arm, gave me a nod and with a decided step, went up to her. 'Has he gone mad?' I wondered. Widmar kept his left hand in his coat pocket. He pulled something out and raised his hat.

" 'Excuse me,' he said loudly, 'but I believe Madame has lost this glove.'

"He held out to her a yellow, leather glove.

"I saw how the woman looked into his eyes with an insolent, piercing glance. At the same time, without knowing why, it seemed to me that I was very ugly
. . . .

"That evening I firmly decided to make light of everything. We went home by cab. The whole way Widmar kept complaining of pain in the heart. He has a very advanced neurosis. But this evening I was convinced he talked of nothing but his ailments intentionally, so as to divert my attention more successfully."

This passage always annoyed Widmar terribly. "How is it possible to be so conceitedly stupid! Women don't possess the smallest degree of intuition, and yet they're convinced they have this imaginary feeling!" he exclaimed with especial indignation when he remembered it was this very evening, after his return home, that he had had his first heart attack. "Women exist in the troubled world of their presentiments and so-called

intuition, and it's difficult to explain to them that things happen quite differently from how it seems to them. Old wives' tittle-tattle!" he repeated.

"I was coldly tender to him so that he felt his loneliness that evening, against the background of this premeditated tenderness. One can refuse a man nothing, and yet do so with such inward indifference that he will feel more wretched and lonely than ever. However, I'm sorry for my behaviour, which was far too risky.

"Two weeks after, he visited me, and I realised at once, from his eyes and also by his uncertain movements, that he'd betrayed me. Men don't know how to hide anything.

" 'Well?' I said gaily. I myself didn't know why I was so gay then. 'Well, you've made the acquaintance of that woman?'

"He put his hat on a chair and stood in front of the cupboard with the mirror, stroking his beard. I noticed that the grey patches seemed to have grown smaller. 'Is he dyeing it?' I wondered. He smiled at me in the mirror with a somewhat melancholy smile, a contortion of the muscles, rather.

" 'I have made her acquaintance,' he replied after a moment, and he looked at his reflection, or perhaps looked at me for I, too, was visible in the mirror.

" 'I guessed it at once,' I said with the same involuntary gaiety, 'though you've never guessed anything about me!'

"His reflection in the mirror assumed an expression at once discouraged and suspicious. I was ready at that moment to say anything in the world to him, if it brought home his infamy. I began waving my arms, I experienced the agreeable sensation that I

was soon going to tell him the truth, but I caught his look in the mirror and when he again asked me what this meant, I answered :

“ ‘ You never guessed this, that I love you.’

“ Evidently this was the worst truth I could have told him. The mirror misted over, I could see our dark shapes and the blotches of our faces. He informed me, without turning his head, that never by a single word had he bound himself to me. It was clear what he was aiming at. I could bear no more and burst into tears and reproaches. I told him that he didn’t appreciate my faithfulness and devotion, that he had no regard for the only woman who really loved him.

“ ‘ And when you leave me, you just go to anyone !’ I cried.

“ He became so furious it took my breath away. The mirror was as if darkened. Widmar turned towards me.

“ ‘ Anyone ?’ he repeated with a kind of astonishment.

“ Then I recapitulated all the gossip I knew.

“ ‘ This woman has lived with this and that man, ask them what she’s worth. Everyone knows all about her !’

“ In spite of his outward calm, I was convinced he was in a paroxysm of rage.

“ ‘ Perhaps she’s betraying you at this very moment while you’re here with me !’ I shrieked. ‘ But that’s what you should all get !’

“ I felt wretched and gay by turns.

“ ‘ And me — you think I haven’t betrayed you either ?’ I burst out laughing and with satisfaction

came tumbling out with the confession of all my infidelities.

“ ‘What? You didn’t know anything about it? And yet everyone in town’s talking about it, that I made you wear the horns!’

“ He knew nothing about it, and suddenly I felt emptiness and silence in my soul, as if my bowels, my heart, everything, were altogether lacking. He really knew nothing about it, suspected nothing. Does God deprive men of all reason in such situations? ‘I’m lying!’ I wanted to cry to reassure him, but he’d already picked up his hat and slammed the door.

“ ‘Go on, then, fly from one betrayal to the other!’ I cried gaily, and rushed headlong after him down the stairs. ‘Wait!’

“ He went down the street, hurrying straight ahead, and escaped from me in the crowd. ‘All right!’ I acquiesced, and went to the café. It was a *thé dansant*. All the tables were occupied.

“ All the tables were occupied, I remember, a certain afternoon when I was discharged from the hospital, and it seemed as if my health were improving. I went to the café for I didn’t know where to go. Widmar had been married for nearly a year, almost, and from that time I hadn’t seen him once. I didn’t bother about it, for I knew that, if he guessed I was waiting, he’d come back. A woman must know how to wait. Only once I wrote him a letter saying that he’s unspeakably vile, and that such a thing can only be washed out in blood. He didn’t reply. However, I understand him well and know this letter had its effect. And I feel myself that what is to happen is found in the inevitable rule of the

realities of love, that means in love itself and the unfailing return of the one to the other."

When Widmar read this sentence, he generally exploded with laughter. "This is the one amusing thing in the whole libel!" he would shout, rubbing his hands, but with painful concentration he imbibed the following sentences once more which, as if in spite, were clear and positive:

"Besides, Widmar won't be able to stay with this woman, for he'll learn from me that she's certainly betraying him and that her past was blacker than . . ."

At this juncture, Sophia Dubilanka used a gross and frightening comparison. Then she wrote that Rebecca Widmar was nothing but a common officers' wench. The captain of the first squadron of cavalry, Andrew Rozjemczy, headed the shocking list of lovers, which covered nearly a whole page. "What an abominable lie!" cried Widmar in pain, but he could not tear himself away from this tragic and voluptuous perusal. His eyes devoured the pages he already knew by heart, and when he turned it over to read the other side, he still had before his eyes the spectres of men in uniform. On this following page, Sophia Dubilanka described an incident that happened at the café shortly after Rebecca Widmar's operation and after her discharge from the hospital.

"All the tables were occupied. But the maître d'hôtel knows me well and found me a table, very uncomfortable as it was right in a corner. I wasn't alone, but I don't want Widmar to know who I was with. They were dancing a tango. The jazz band's trumpets glittered over the dancers' heads. Unfortunately, we were sitting so near the orchestra, that one of the trumpets was blaring right in my ear, absolutely stupefying me. They were throwing

streamers and confetti. The waiter kept on going by us, and always with a new pail from which the necks of iced bottles stuck out. I wondered who could be drinking so much, and looked around for this good-time party, putting my lorgnette to my eyes. But there was nothing in front of me but heads and bare shoulders and I couldn't manage to see at all, while my companion was annoyed that I kept turning my head. When I had discovered this table, however, I stopped at once, and only threw furtive glances in that direction.

"At the table were Widmar and his wife with a few men. They were obviously strangers, as I didn't know any of them. Widmar sat next his wife, and had such a radiant face that I'd have preferred to forget his expression for ever. He was tanned, swarthy, almost black. His teeth glittered at every movement of his lips. His wife left the table now and then, when one or other of the men asked her to dance. She wore a flame-red dress and a little red hat with a provocative black feather. When she rose from her chair, she probably nudged or touched him somehow, or made him some other sign, for he at once smiled at her. I noticed it several times. But then an incident occurred about which he certainly doesn't know to this day, for it was at this very moment he'd gone to the buffet with a friend.

"That woman was dancing. At the table was a group completely unknown to me. Now I ask myself this question: How is it that a man always goes to the buffet at the precise moment when something's going to happen to his wife? One might really think some immoral power exists which arranges events in just such a way as to make betraying and lying easier

for people. I doubt whether it's mere chance, since every man encounters such facts in his life. For example, I know for sure that if the idea of betrayal comes to a woman, in the same moment this design is born she suddenly sees how simple and easy it is. All events of themselves pursue a course in the one definite direction so as to arrive at the goal. A man never comes into the room at the moment when his wife is kissing her lover, rather he always comes in a few minutes after. Why? Among ten of his friends, a man is always jealous of the nine innocent, but the tenth, with whom his wife is betraying him, he never suspects. Why? There must be some sort of hidden law in it, otherwise it wouldn't happen at every step.

"If it is a law, all betrayal and lying are natural things, protected by nature herself. It seems that this law is in some way involved with time. The party that betrays lives somehow quicker, the betrayed, on the other hand, is always behind. I want to laugh, even, when I think of it and talk about it. Hardly have the lovers exchanged a meaning look and squeezed each other's hands than the husband, seated beside them, turns towards them a fraction of a second late, when the lovers' faces are already quite indifferent. Why? Why did Widmar go to the buffet at the precise moment when this accident happened to his wife in the dance-hall? He disappeared behind the curtain with as much haste as if impelled by this immoral, supernatural power. He was gay and carefree. Why is a man gay and carefree just at the moment when, behind his back, the most abominable things are going on? If this has to be regarded as a compensation, then this compensation is like a mockery and not in the very least consoling. The heavy lilac curtain fell to behind him, the dance

was crowded and noisy, and, of course, nobody noticed his exit.

“Meanwhile, Widmar’s wife was revolving in the middle of the hall. The red of her dress made her stand out from the crowd, she was lost among the dancers to shine out among them again, and one might have thought a fire was going to burst out at once. They were playing a tango. The couples were moving slowly, lazily and voluptuously. Just at my ear blared the trumpet’s silver mouth.

“It seemed to me several times that I caught someone’s eye in the crowd fixed on me, but it was evidently an impression without foundation.

“Then something happened in the hall among the crowd of dancers, for suddenly the rotating, closely clasped couples stood rigid, and then turned their faces towards the same point, I didn’t know why. A living circle closed about an invisible axis, invisible to begin with, but after a while I saw that this axis was of a brilliant red colour. She was standing motionless in the arms of her partner, who freed an arm at last with difficulty, and began to wave it despairingly in the air. The red axis remained motionless. Her head was thrown back and her arms fell heavily and limply down her partner’s dark jacket. Then she slowly let herself slip to the floor, giving the impression of some infernal flame sinking underground. Her partner’s hand, that was raised above people’s heads, fell again with despairing swiftness, and strove unsuccessfully to keep this sinking column of living fire above ground.

“I stood up from my chair so as to see better, I put my glasses to my eyes and then saw that the woman had fainted in her partner’s arms during the dance. She stayed motionless in the middle of the dance-hall,

and everyone stood round stiffly, not knowing what to do. Then, when I saw her eyes were open and that she was obviously moving them, while the whites gleamed now and then, the thought occurred to me that Widmar's wife was plainly and simply drunk. In any case, she was half-conscious. She couldn't make a movement, and her head fell further and further back. I looked on at it all as at some interesting stage scene. I was excited, I kept on laughing, and when I again got up from my chair, I felt a look fixed on me once more.

"I turned my head quickly in the direction of the look that kept evading me in the crowd. I thought it was Widmar already returning, but the hanging curtain completely screened the entrance to the buffet. The music went on without a break. The players probably didn't want to increase the public alarm. Besides, all this didn't last any longer than a minute. I turned my head quite round to the right, searching the look which was certainly directed at me, and then, in one of the boxes, I saw a man who stood up quickly, and, elbowing his way among the people, ran to the middle of the hall. He was evidently alone in the box and I was amazed I hadn't seen him until then, for the box was only a few steps from me. This man seemed familiar to me, but for a long time I couldn't decide who it was, for I saw his figure, shoving its way through the crowd, only from behind. I had noticed how he jumped from the settee with the agility and vigour of a circus acrobat. Bottles of spirits were left standing on the table, the table rocked but the bottles didn't even move. The man glided among his neighbours, quickly and adroitly avoiding all the little tables. As he went I heard him say in a mechanical and monotonous voice: 'Pardon, pardon!'

. . . . and with every ' Pardon ! ' his black head turned to right or left, like a well-oiled machine. As he advanced, so did the crowd open before him, the couples scattered, and in the end the man was left with this woman and her partner, forming a trio in the middle of the empty hall covered with streamers and confetti.

" At sight of the man who drew near, that woman seemed to come to her senses a little. ' What a farce ! ' I thought, and very nearly burst out laughing in sheer indignation. But it wasn't a farce. For in the same moment, the man stooped over her and grasped her firmly under the arms. Then I distinctly saw her face. She was terribly pale, with the clayey pallor of the dying. I realised that she was suffering physically and half-mad with pain. However, she obediently made a step forward, led by the man.

" ' Who is that man ? ' I asked my companion, and sat down again at the table with an air of perfect indifference.

" ' Doctor Tamten,' he replied.

" This saddened me a little, as always when I'm reminded of my shortsightedness. The music went on playing a tango, and the couples began revolving again. A moment after, surgeon Tamten and Widmar's wife passed by me. I raised my lorgnette to my eyes, and saw their faces two steps away. They were quite calm, as if nothing had happened. The surgeon wore a false, unnatural smile, and was saying something. Mrs. Widmar was listening to him absent-mindedly, not even looking at him.

" I noticed through my glasses that her right cheek was powdered and the left not. I instinctively glanced at the doctor's right shoulder. I wasn't mistaken. On

his shoulder he had, of course, a white patch, as if he'd been strewn with flour. As they passed quite close by our table, the surgeon was saying: 'A trifle! . . . not allowed . . . tomorrow . . . I'll see . . . a trifle! . . . ' but I couldn't understand anything from these fragments. I did, however, make out the last sentence in full. 'You mustn't dance too soon, it might cause a hæmorrhage! . . . ' As he said that, our eyes met, and at last I caught the look that had been following me during the evening. It was golden, alert, as if he were on his guard. He gave me a quick bow, while I lowered by lorgnette. Before that, though, I had managed to see a certain, interesting detail; the surgeon, as he took his leave of her, deliberately turned his back to me; he stooped quickly and brushed her bare arm with his lips. I can swear that's how it really happened. And, of course, it was a second later when Widmar came back.

"He came from behind the curtain at the very moment when surgeon Tamten was already standing erect. His face and look were absolutely expressionless, lifeless, almost. He'd already taken a step or two in the direction of his table, and although he almost touched Widmar with his shoulder, Widmar wasn't aware of him and didn't notice him. It's possible that this immoral power I described made him blind for a moment. Widmar sat down beside his wife with such a disarming confidence and such a foolish trust, that I wanted to shout to him across the heads and tables everything I already knew about the hospital and the operation."

Generally, when Widmar had reached this place in the memoirs, it seemed to him that he had reached a border

behind which there was a swarm of hated and unknown figures. "*Kyrie eleison!*" he cried with a mystic virulence. From this point Sophia Dubilanka summarised all the gossip concerning Rebecca Widmar's past and present. With an obscene precision she described the betrothals that never ended in marriage, she wrote about the lovers, each of whom, according to Sophia Dubilanka's written evidence, was either a drunkard or a degenerate. "He was a man who was never without cocaine!" she wrote about a painter, for example. "I had an idea, even, that they sniffed it together."

Fortunately, Widmar was personally acquainted with this painter, and knew for certain that he had never been a cocaine addict. Such a fact was consoling, for it undermined any faith in the rest of the information. "Libel!" roared Widmar with boundless satisfaction. "A pity this hag's dead!" But when he read the following passage, the passage on the hospital and the hospital rumours, he was quiet, for these rumours corresponded in an alarming way with the reality he had already partly managed to reconstitute on the basis of the information collected. "I've verified that this is true," he thought, "in that case the other things may be equally true! But still I'd never have imagined Tamten was in love with my wife! Still less would I have believed that Rebecca would have returned his feeling. With eyes like that! Legs like that!" Exclaiming, "Eyes and legs!" he had the air of a madman; but this exclamation was only the logical abbreviation of the following illogical reasoning: "A woman with such eyes and such legs couldn't lie every day, every hour, every moment. Besides, lying produces a physical stigma on a person's outward appearance."

Widmar's relations with his wife were complicated to

such an extent that he could no longer apply this pseudo-psychological discovery to her. He was too close to her life to have an objective idea of it. For betrayal has a dimension of its own which is to be comprehended only from a greater distance than is allowed by a common personal life. One can dwell in a great edifice without suspecting how it looks from the outside. It is only the perspective that makes it possible for us to grasp the whole. Perhaps that is why it is easier for people living outside the orbit of our private life to see its insincerity. Widmar was less well acquainted than his friends with the story of his own marriage, and perhaps that is exactly why Sophia Dubilanka affirmed with such obstinacy and certainty that, at the hospital, she had known in detail of Rebecca's last betrayal, which Widmar did not even suspect. At the hospital, every patient and every attendant had a clearer and better understanding of the course of events than the nearest man on earth, as the husband was supposed to be.

It was of these incidents especially that Sophia Dubilanka wrote at length and with singular enjoyment.

"I had a sharp attack and a painful inflammation of the kidneys," she wrote three weeks before her death, which was to follow in All Saints' hospital. It turned out to be the result of neglected tuberculosis. Surgeon Tamten performed the operation, with disastrous results. "I was sent to the hospital by the Health Insurance people. As if out of spite all the places were filled. Boguski, the house-physician, met me on the steps. I was climbing painfully out of the car, when the engine suddenly began roaring, and the poor old fellow was so frightened that he straightway jumped back inside and shut the doors behind him.

" 'I can't bear cars,' he said, guiding me along

anxiously by the arm. I was in terrible pain ; I was doubled up and moved with difficulty, but under the old doctor's care I at once grew calmer. This old man is a general favourite among the patients. He led me to the waiting-room, examined my analyses, then rang for the sister and disappeared into the office. He kept returning every few minutes, however, and said : ' I'm very sorry ! ' and disappeared again. It proved that there wasn't a single place free in the hospital. I heard them trying to find Doctor Tamten. There was a shout of, ' Where's Doctor Tamten ? ' He was at an operation. The house-physician Boguski was deputising for him. At last the old man sat down beside me and said apologetically :

" ' All the beds are occupied, madam. But for the time being, we'll put you in a private ward with another patient, who has just undergone an operation '

" He took me to the dressing-room and examined me, but so delicately and carefully that I hardly felt his hands.

" ' Nothing serious,' he said, comfortingly. However, I was exhausted from this unexpected illness, and I couldn't believe him. I sat there half naked, I was rather cold, and so I began to cry. I kept on remembering Widmar. Then Boguski began a conversation to entertain me, he talked about anything to distract my attention. He didn't know how to comfort me, for the kinder he was to me, the more I wanted to cry. I remember he talked about motor-cars, and this was such an unexpected topic of conversation that I listened to him in spite of myself. He told me that, according to statistics, it was easier to be run over by a car than to win in a lottery.

“ ‘What a dreadful invention !’ he repeated disgustedly as he washed his hands. ‘It’s absolutely essential for everyone to be insured ! Personally, I’d prefer being cut to pieces alive, not for anything will I travel by car !’

“ Then he spoke of his daughter, grieving a little. Only I couldn’t understand whether his daughter is alive, or whether she’d been run over in a car accident.

“ ‘I warn them, I warn all of them !’ he cried, and already he was beginning to get on my nerves with his abnormal fears. ‘I myself,’ he said, ‘saw a fat man into whose belly the driving-wheel had pierced. He was lying under the wheels, and just because of this driving-wheel, it was impossible to get him out. It was a Daimler. An eight-cylindereed devil, isn’t it ?’

“ And when they laid me on the stretcher, he said gaily : ‘Here’s the only way of travelling without danger !’ and accompanied me to the first floor. ‘Not there, not there !’ he exclaimed, for in mistake they wanted to carry me into the general ward. ‘To number hundred and one !’ The sister opened the door of a private ward and I saw a room full of flowers. A woman was lying on her back in bed, one arm was stretched alongside her body, with the other she covered her eyes. In spite of that, I recognised her at once.

“ She lay with her head to the door ; my bed, however, was a little further off and so arranged that it was turned to face the window. In this way our heads were nearly touching, but to see each other we had to sit up in bed and look over the pillows and bedrails. She couldn’t do this at all. I noticed in passing that the eiderdown covering her was parti-

cularly inflated round the hips, it looked as if she had a big, pregnant belly, but actually it was only the bandages. From the start she complained about her dressings. She could not move, so she was very worked up and kept on calling the doctor and the sisters every ten minutes. She told Boguski that she couldn't bear it any longer, and that if he didn't give her an injection at once, she'd tear off all these rags ! That's the way she put it. Boguski started fussing round her straight away and apologising. He was distressed beyond words, he felt quite ashamed, but he really couldn't give her an injection all the same ; it was hardly an hour ago that he'd given her one. She grumbled something very rude in reply, and when the house-physician shut the door behind him she added that she wished he'd be run over by a car three times. Then she groaned and kept moving her hand up and down on the satin eiderdown until at last the scratching began to get on my nerves.

" Then Doctor Tamten came dashing into our room. I didn't see him come in, I only heard the door close, then light, almost imperceptible footsteps and then a white figure in a surgeon's coat blocked my view of the window. He bowed his shaggy head over me and leant his hands on the white-painted back of a chair.

" ' How do you feel ? ' he asked. His face, which was in shadow, sparkled with a perpetual smile. The white line of his teeth cut across his face.

" He then asked me if anybody in our family had ever suffered from tuberculosis, and he was apparently very satisfied when I told him that my father had died of consumption. He nodded his head and the teeth again gleamed in his face.

" ' I've seen your analysis,' he said. ' There's

nothing extraordinary there You'll stay in this room a few days"

"He didn't finish because at this moment there came from the neighbouring bed a frankly animal snarl. Then the surgeon went over to the window and began walking up and down alongside the empty wall of the room.

" 'All the beds are occupied,' he explained, and I felt quite sure he wasn't giving explanations to me. 'In any case, it's possible that a bed will be vacant in a few hours, but in the men's section.'

"Behind me someone began moving about on the bed again and groaning, but now with an obvious, even coquettish contentment. Lowering his voice, the surgeon added: 'You can't smell the unpleasant scent of petrol?' and then he appeared in front of me again in the window, but turned springily on his heel and the next instant was in the other corner of the room. In reply, we heard a laugh.

"It was so inopportune, so sudden and incomprehensible, that I forgot my own illness and wanted to sit up in bed. The laugh was tinkling, rippling, exactly like a little girl's. It rose so close to my ear that at first I thought I had earphones on my head, or that my pillows were laughing, a lovely laugh. 'One has to have a golden throat!' I thought without any jealousy. The whole room was lulled with this laugh. In place of vocal chords, that woman had some strange violin! The sounds went running one after the other, they rose and fell like roulades of the finest music. I don't know myself what to compare this laugh to. It reached the highest notes and then ran down low, without any dissonance, in a mocking cascade! It was really a concert of laughter!

" Then the surgeon broke off his pacing from corner to corner, I raised my head and saw he'd halted by the radiator.

" It was plain to see that he was astonished. He looked towards this woman's bed as if he saw a jazz orchestra on the mattress, instead of a sick woman. It seemed to me that he even brought out ' Good God ! ' and clapped his hands. Then he took a few quick steps, and with an utterly different face which had, so to say, lost its private character, he asked :

" ' Why are you crying ? '

" When he said this, I realised that actually this laugh was terribly forced, and that it was sobs and gulps rather than laughter !

" ' Lie still, please ! ' snarled the surgeon.

" Again I couldn't see anyone, for the pillows and bedrails were in my way. Only I noticed on the wall above me a hand in a white sleeve searching for the bell. After a moment a sister came in and the surgeon said :

" ' Bring a basin, please, the patient's vomiting.' "

" It proved to be the convulsions and nausea following anæsthesia. There was a smell of ether.

" Doctor Tamten sat at the patient's bedside, I heard the springs creak, while the surgeon said quietly, almost in a whisper, that he'd come once more in the evening, as he had an important communication to make. Then I heard something, the sound of a kiss it seemed to me. However it was, I know it was like that, because I could feel there was something between them. Two hours later I was taken out of the private ward and carried to another wing

" It was then I learnt in the hospital that this woman had been operated on the previous day. At

first it was said to be appendicitis, then that there had been some feminine complications in addition, a tumour or something of that sort. But they were also saying it was in reality something quite different If this is true, and if Widmar knows nothing about it, it means that his wife, already being his wife, has betrayed him. I reckoned it on my fingers’ ”

This is what Sophia Dubilanka wrote, who was to die in All Saints' hospital as the result of a serious operation and atrophy of the left kidney. Surgeon Tamten, after an exact cystoscopy, that is, an examination of the functioning of both kidneys, performed an operation and removed the kidney, but this was followed by a general extension of the illness, and the remaining healthy, left kidney atrophied. Two weeks later, more or less, Sophia Dubilanka died. Before her death she had written down in detail all she knew about Widmar's wife, and, in writing her memoirs, she felt as though she were writing her testament.

With this strange testament in his pocket, Widmar had been running about the town since early morning. He had got up early and when he went out into the street, he suddenly realised that along the streets, the footwalks and the pavements, only spectres in skirts were walking. That was undeniable. He strolled about the town looking at the women. He felt a physical horror of them all. The amorality of woman roused a profound disgust in him, but at the same time this horror called up in him a singular, abnormal excitement, and a keen interest in every woman he met. This heightened sensual excitement bordered almost on erotomania. And a peculiar thing : this excitement seemed to radiate outwards, and all of them, in spite of themselves, could sense it.

A man sated with love can be in the company of a passionate woman under conditions most favourable to a tender intimacy, and yet not rouse the least movement of physical curiosity in her. But it is enough for him, his love unsatisfied, to appear in the street, let us say, for every passing woman to throw him a troubled glance. So it was now. They all glanced at him, however fleetingly, and all fixed their intent, clinging look on his beard, his red lips, his eyes.

So he tried to look only at the ground, at the stones in the pavement, so as not to feel the touch of these glances, for every one of them reminded him of love, and every love hid in itself the germs of the common, inevitable betrayal. On the ground, however, he saw women's feet, these thrice-accursed hiding-places of the most hideous lie.

In his indignation he even stood still in the middle of the pavement. Something glided rumbling past him. The pavement resounded. A few steps away, Widmar saw a cab dashing down the street. It was carried along in a haze of dust, he saw it as if in a cloud. In the cab sprawled surgeon Tamten. He was quite grey, thick with dust, but he was as smiling as ever. On his knees he held a large, nickel-plated box. "Where's he going?" wondered Widmar, and at once lost sight of him.

It was noon. Widmar decided not to return home until evening, when everything would be clear, and he rushed to the café to take a snack. The waiters were wearing their white summer jackets, and the head-waiter Pierre wiped the sweat from his forehead.

"I simply can't breathe!" . . . he groaned.

A woman was drinking orangeade through a straw, one glass, a second, a third. "Wasn't it she who asked me about my wife a few days ago?" Widmar wondered.

He swallowed a cup of cold soup and took the papers. But, as it proved, he found it impossible to read. Everywhere, on every page, in every column, he found notes on suicides, crimes against a back-ground of jealousy, betrayals, love quarrels. Fifteen cases a day, more, a hundred, still more, a thousand ! . . . Only then did he cast his eyes on the monstrous statistic. We go on living and to this very day we do not realise that the greatest plague of mankind is love !

He glanced through the window. There was an incredible dust in the street, the pavement seemed to smoke. In spite of this he went out on to the steps, and at once his eyes and mouth were filled with sand.

The walls of houses, the pavements were covered with smoking dust, the street disappeared under a greyish-yellow veil, and in the middle of the street Doctor Tamten surged from the cloud in his cab.

The surgeon was holding on his knees a metal box containing his instruments. His face was both smiling and immobile. The surgeon, seated in his cab, glided by the bewildered Widmar and disappeared in the dusty cloud like a phantom. It was so unreal and fantastic that Widmar again suspected himself of hallucination, and if, at the last moment, the surgeon had not seen him and bowed, he would have gone on thinking he was dreaming. But Tamten raised his arm, Widmar lifted his hat in response, the surgeon and the cab both disappeared, and only for a moment longer could his white shirt-sleeve be seen.

"Where's he going ?" wondered Widmar. Then he realised that he had really no idea what his wife was doing at this moment, nor where she might be at this time. He went back to the café and told the waiter to phone his home.

"Just ask, please, whether Mrs. Widmar's at home"

But hardly had the waiter shut the door of the telephone-box behind him than Widmar felt Rebecca was certainly not at home. When the waiter returned, he at once asked: "Where has she gone?"

"She's gone to town," replied the waiter. "The maid said she's at the hairdresser's."

"I'd like to see this barber!" was Widmar's incomprehensible reply. Then he shouted: "In weather like this!"

He himself, however, without heeding the weather, again went out into the street.

"Even if I don't know the truth, I must liquidate this affair!" he shouted aloud, to the alarm of passers-by. He remembered his study and the nightmares that haunted him at night. He dreamed every night that, as in the old days, Sophia Dubilanka came into his study, but with quite different intentions from those of yore. "Such a thing can be washed out only in blood!" she cried. He knew that she was about to grab the rifle from the wall, but he was paralysed and could not move. "Now I'm going to shoot you!" she screamed, and he wakened at his own cry.

The weapon's oiled barrels, the cartridges and the strange, red splashes, as if somebody had spattered it all with red ink, flashed before his eyes.

The street was again full of phantoms in skirts, it was simply swarming with feminine figures; at every corner, from every house, appeared a white or coloured dress which came swimming towards him. At last, in Batory Street, not far from the great statesman's statue, he saw a group of people composed entirely of men. They were labourers. Although it was already tea-time and Widmar was in a hurry—he had the impression all the while that

he was going to be late for the meeting arranged with tailor Gold—he halted for a time and stood watching the job.

Two workmen were digging in the ground in a villa yard, some others were setting up a pole. One of them seemed familiar to Widmar, as if he knew him and had seen him before. He observed him closely and then actually gave vent to a cry of surprise. The workman was tall and broad-shouldered, he had red, tousled hair, and every moment his voice was raised in the courtyard.

“Hello, brother! Hold this cable! . . . Give me a porcelain insulator! . . . Where are the gloves? . . .”

He was running here and there, his blue overall and voluminous blue trousers appearing all over the place, until at last he dashed to the gate, and stood by the barrier, quite close to Widmar. It was the electrician, the switchboard operator, Isaac Gold, the tailor’s brother. He stood motionless for a moment, looking up in the air somewhere. Then he grumbled through his teeth that he could not remember such a wind in all his life.

“What a pest!” he cried at last. “Can’t see a thing! Hello, brother, how many volts has this current got?” Then he lowered his head and noticed Widmar in front of him. He stiffened, but then quickly mastered himself and took off his cap. “Good-day, sir,” he said humbly.

Widmar made a vague gesture of the hand and opened his mouth, the switchboard operator was prepared for a question, but Widmar shrugged his shoulders and passed by in silence. He heard the operator shout behind him:

“Foul weather! . . . I want to know how many volts?”

With head lowered Widmar made his way along the pavement, waving his arms and cursing. He did not know what to do. It was at least an hour until dusk. “How

do I know she'll betray me just at dusk ? " he thought, not without humour, and ran on still faster. " Perhaps it's just at noon ! " He was worried by the news that his wife was not at home. " Ought I to go to her hairdresser, then ? " and he turned back then, before reaching the square where the statue stood, and set off towards the first side street. His madness increased with almost every second. If at that moment he had caught his wife in the very act of betrayal, he would have perpetrated the most abominable crime without hesitating. And here, just as he reached the hairdressing saloon, whose sign was dimmed by smoking dust, something snorted at his ear and Widmar noticed a cab in front of the shop.

" Aha ! " exclaimed Widmar, and quickly concealed himself in a doorway on the other side of the street. With admirable patience he waited a quarter of an hour. At the end of this quarter of an hour he saw the door of the house opposite open, and the opening darken for a moment. On the other hand, the hairdresser's door was shut the whole time.

In the open doorway opposite appeared surgeon Tamten. He held the glittering box of instruments in his hand. His black, ruffled hair fell on his forehead. Turning his back to Widmar, surgeon Tamten said something, shouted it, even, into the yawning blackness of the open door.

" If the nose-bleeding recurs ! . . . " Widmar heard him shout, " give the medicine I've left ! Keep in a sitting position ! " Then he turned quickly round and halted on the threshold with the air of a man who has just had an unpleasant surprise. Yet he raised his hat and bowed.

" Good-day ! " he cried, and Widmar, confused and ashamed, came out of the doorway. He also raised his hat.

Meanwhile, the surgeon had already taken his seat in the cab. As he did so, his expression was grave and concentrated, as if he had performed the most difficult operation. The cabby moved, but the surgeon did not turn his head, refusing to look at Widmar. In any case, Widmar would have avoided his look. He stood motionless, dumbfounded, in a stiff, affected position. "Why am I continually meeting him?" he wondered, not grasping that this was one of the surgeon's ordinary working days.

On such a working day the surgeon went from home to home, from house to house like lightning, alert, bustling. On such a working day Surgeon Tamten went from dressing to consultation, from consultation to operation, he went through smoke, tempest and dust, lolling in the cab, feeling that he had a rubber plaster instead of a spine. He bestowed his artificial smile right and left to the mothers and fathers he met in the streets, whose children he had cured, to the wives, husbands, brothers and sisters of patients he had cured or killed.

In surgeon Tamten's pocket was the great capital's daily paper. On the first page, among the columns devoted to the most important political events, a series of grateful thanks was printed in a black border: "For his unusually solicitous care and the marvellously conducted operation which saved the life of our little one, to Dr. Tamten, Superintendent of All Saints' hospital, we offer our dearest and warmest thanks and pray God to reward him!" But accustomed to both gratitude and malediction, surgeon Tamten was no longer concerned with his own popularity. Mortally tired but indefatigable, he fulfilled his duties, whose romantic, well-nigh superhuman burden he no longer felt. Besides, romanticism, in his opinion, came into it in a wholly different way,

namely, in his private life and the events of the past few days. He realised that, unfortunately, this romanticism was of a suspect quality, but for the time being he could do nothing about it. "She's quite frankly a pathological woman!" he repeated, at once irritated and moved. This pathological power of hers was really extraordinary. Neither separation nor time could cure him now. "But some solution must come!" he growled, and was surprised at himself that, in spite of everything, he was waiting for this solution as if it were not to bring him the bitterest sadness.

But an accepted sadness is better than an uncertain joy, so if he could have known that unhappiness ultimately awaited him, he would have been happy, rather. "Rebecca!" he sighed at the height of rapture, but then he suddenly saw a shadow standing in a doorway, and became subconsciously gloomy. "Why am I continually meeting him?" That is exactly what Widmar was thinking, standing motionless on the pavement. Dusk fell. A whirling cloud of yellow dust fell on the house roofs and hung over the pavements like a shifting, stifling fog.

All his life, Widmar could never recall how he passed the rest of that afternoon. He only knew that, for the best part of two hours, he still went wandering round the town, calling in at the café from time to time. So great was the confusion in his mind that he even forgot where and when he had made an appointment with tailor Gold. He had got it into his head that it was actually in the city café. That was why he was particularly alarmed when he did not find him there. When he learnt from him a short time later that they had arranged to meet in an entirely different place, he was genuinely amazed.

He sat at a table alone, his head propped on his hands, his eyes fixed blankly on something, returning to himself only at the appearance of every woman who showed herself on the café terrace. For each one, in some inexplicable way, reminded him of his wife. He also recalled the efforts he had made to study objectively the emotion of jealousy which, for several days, had not left him in peace.

All the modern notions on this so-called ugly emotion were well-known to him, for in spite of all, he was a well-read and cultured man. He perceived the insincerity of the mind, which is ready at all times to excuse the most primitive outbursts and human instincts. The mind is a kind of apparatus, serving only to justify our sensations. A man deceived in love manages to erect a passable theory idealising every betrayed love. The man who betrays always proves the morality of his own betrayal.

In such a way did Widmar, in his jealousy, convince himself that jealousy is an absolutely indispensable feeling, testifying the sincerity of love. His mind at once suggested a series of proofs, stressing the correctness of this affirmation. He understood that love is invariably associated with the notion of exclusiveness, above all when it is spontaneous in its manifestations. The sincerer the feeling, the darker and more terrible it is.

Do not mankind's present tendencies towards the hygiene of mind and body demand the ventilation of all sentimental relations, and, in consequence, the destruction of these cultural superstructures which stifle and enclose the authentic feelings within the borders of propriety?

He did not doubt that if love were deprived of jealousy, it would immure itself within the frame of new conventions. Such conventions seemed to him peculiarly repugnant and immoral, for from the moment he

renounced his exclusive right he would have for his beloved much contempt and little love. "The greatest crime is disloyalty to oneself!" he thought with pathetic sophistry. "Nobody has the right to trample his own feelings underfoot, that's a crime against nature! And in any case, why do it?"

Again, the word "crime" suggested the thought of the rifle hanging over the couch in his study. Had he at that moment possessed a near friend, he would certainly have begged him to take every weapon out of his house. But he had no such friend, as is general among men who are too expert in the love of women. Every man, in fact, in love with a woman, gives up his friends sooner or later. Besides, in this case, Widmar was content enough. He preserved his freedom of action entire.

He pushed the table from him noisily, stood up, shook himself and saw with melancholy that it was already dark in the street. Then he decided to return home, and, without waiting for the tailor any longer, to take the initiative in his own hands. This meant nothing more nor less than murder.

The shadows in the street again seemed blood-red, there were explosive gusts of wind like shots out hunting.

"No! No!" Widmar's cry rang down the street, and he stood still. Obviously he could not decide on this irrevocable step as long as he was not in possession of the final certainty. Before his eyes glimmered his wife's face, he recalled in painful detail all her caresses and words, and again he stopped believing in the probability of his own suspicions. He even felt ashamed of their ignominy. "After all, at bottom, it's I who am betraying her with my suspicions!" he murmured in the blindness of his honesty. He walked more and more slowly, the nearer home he drew, the more his steps dragged. He could

already see the black silhouette of his villa and the ruined gate beside it. As he passed the gate a shadow again detached itself from the rain-pipe.

Widmar shuddered, and recalled surgeon Tamten.

"Who's there?" he cried and was greatly cheered that it was none other than tailor Gold.

"What abominable weather, my dear sir!" he said to Widmar with unexpected familiarity.

"Ah, it's you!" called Widmar joyfully. Then he exclaimed in a whisper: "Why weren't you at the café where I was waiting for you?"

"We arranged to meet in this gate, dear sir," replied the tailor humbly, and only then did Widmar recollect that it really was so.

"I've been waiting for you half an hour," he heard a croaking old voice. At the same time a cellar odour breathed on him. This smell was disturbing; it recalled both incense and the mortuary. "What an undertaker!" shuddered Widmar, and further recalled that a few days before, Rebecca had noticed this stench and had attributed to it an ominous significance. Doctor Tamten had once discussed this odour jokingly. The surgeon asserted that doctors and priests are particularly well acquainted with this smell, which rises from the bed of the dying as if the process of decomposition had already set in a few days before death. It is *odor mortis* that always testifies to the inescapable end. And yet tailor Gold was not ill and was not lying in bed

"What a horror," repeated Widmar, but fortunately the wind started blowing from another direction.

"Shall we go then, sir?" The tailor's whisper rose in the darkness.

"Yes, yes, of course," said Widmar, and both went quickly up the street.

As they passed Widmar's house they both looked at it together, and noticed that everything was silent and dark.

"There's nobody at home," said the tailor.

Widmar said nothing. It was so dark they could not see each other. At one moment it seemed to Widmar that he was by himself, and that the tailor had vanished somewhere.

"Where have you gone?" he called anxiously, and the wind at once carried his words away.

"I'm here, quite near you, sir!" The tailor's voice reached him after a long enough interval. It turned out he was walking beside him, so near that their arms touched.

"I can't guarantee, sir, that it'll happen just this evening," said the old, half-dead voice.

A second voice, panting and angry, replied:

"This evening it may end up on your own skin!"

"Oh sir, dear sir!" Terrified, the first voice went on as if it came from the other world: "I've already seen everything today . . ."

The second voice replied still more brutally:

"Shut up!"

Then it vibrated on a despairing note:

"To think that the eyes of such a wretch, such a hound, should have seen this!"

In the darkness rose something like a sigh of compassion.

"Shut up!" cried the other voice in agony; and now it seemed as if it came from the pavement opposite.

But the sighs did not stop, they even penetrated the howling of the wind, so loud were they and so mocking. At last they stopped, and there was the sound of words which at first could not be followed.

“ She— brought— him— sweets—— ”

“ What sweets ? ”

“ She brought Boruch sweets,” repeated the tailor, but Widmar could not understand anything. He again felt a touch as if a bat had brushed his arm with its wings ; he drew violently aside and asked :

“ Is it still far ? I can’t see anything ! ”

“ We’re here,” replied the tailor.

They were in front of a two-storeyed tenement house, whose indistinct contours were lost in black clouds. To the left of it was a fence, stretching away along the pavement to the bottom of the street. At the end of it a fairly light rectangular patch could be seen. It was probably an open gate which the wind kept shutting now and then, when the light patch disappeared. Above the gate gloomed the roof of some wretched little house. The fence continued on the left hand, surrounding the house in such a way that between the fence and the building was a barely perceptible alley, very dark and narrow. The alley led to a courtyard.

The tenement house looked newly constructed and still unfinished. It was probably inhabited in part only, for there was no light shining in any of the front windows. Here and there scaffolding had been left, and projecting beams could be made out in the shadows. Just in front of Widmar’s feet was a round, dark object which proved to be a barrel of lime. Beside it something grey could be seen. It was the granite steps of the porch. The rest was drowned in darkness.

"Do we have to go by the steps?" asked Widmar, with a sudden reluctance. He was standing beside tailor Gold, perhaps even face to face with him, but though he looked towards the place where the tailor ought to have been, he could see absolutely nothing. It was only when something black rose up in front of his very eyes that he guessed rather than saw the tailor was pointing his hand towards the gate.

"No, no, sir," Widmar heard the familiar whisper. "We must go across the other yard."

"Why not go straight into the house?" exclaimed Widmar, when something cold and damp grasped him by the hand. "Let me go!" he cried.

At the very moment when they had halted in front of the steps of the two-storeyed tenement, there stirred in Widmar a dim awareness of the meanness he had committed. For the last few days he had been living in a continual state of moral self-deception. And now, just as he reached the goal of his efforts, and was near to seeing his plans accomplished, he caught himself in this trickery. With unexpected strength there rose in him that moral censorship which he had trodden underfoot shamefully and brutally. "Love and baseness are all one!" he repeated, to restore his spirits, but this time the maxim produced an even more demoralising effect on him. He was ashamed, not only of taking a step towards the gate, but even of making a movement. He was degraded in his own eyes, and, as a result, lost his self-assurance. To creep about in the darkness and sneak along the fence seemed to him so humiliating and so painful that he would rather have been publicly slapped on the face by the worst of his wife's lovers than do it. "But still, I've done one mean trick already!" he told himself with poignant conviction, recalling the

incident with surgeon Tamten. He tried at last to devalue himself, so as to make his situation less distressing. "One mean trick, or two, or three, it means nothing any more!" he thought hurriedly, and once again felt something damp grasp him by the hand.

But the memory of the despicable beating-up of surgeon Tamten, which he had paid to have done, awoke no remorse in him. He treated the whole affair very lightly. To strike someone who is paying court to your wife is not such a serious crime! Especially if that someone has not enough courage to confess everything honestly and bear the consequences. But to spy on and mistrust the being nearest and most loved, what a low and revolting action!

"Let me go!" he said to the tailor dully. Then he bowed his head and stepped forward obediently.

Now he saw a black, stooping shape wavering in front of him. It was so near him that he almost trod on the tailor's heels. Suddenly, the tailor's shape shot up against the light background of the open gate.

"Where are you taking me?" asked Widmar, annoyed that he could not even see his own body. He moved with difficulty.

"That's my home," whispered the tailor, his voice dying away. And again something black was raised above his head. It was an arm, with which he was pointing towards his little house. Then he carefully shut the gate.

"Boruch must be asleep already," he continued in an expiring voice.

In the yard, something beside the fence groaned and screeched. But this monotonous, unbearable sound was lost in the tumult and thunder of the swiftly approaching tempest.

The tailor jumped to one side as if blown by the wind, and pressed his body against the fence. For a moment he lost his sense of direction, and could not recognise his own yard. Where his home was, where the ash-tree was, where the other building was, he saw nothing. Terrified, he felt how the fence swayed, ready so it seemed to fall on him. When the wind dropped after a moment, he asked :

“ Did you see that little light ? ”

There was no answer. Everything round about was so plunged in darkness that the tailor could easily have imagined he was already in his coffin. But worst of all, there was nothing to indicate Widmar's presence. He might be there, but equally well he might not.

“ Can you see that little light, sir ? ” the tailor repeated.

As before, he heard no reply. It came into his head that there really was nobody in the yard. Then he began feeling in front of him with his hand, groping in the air and along the fence with more and more desperate gestures. But, at the outset, he encountered nothing.

“ Where are you, sir ? ” he asked tearfully.

Then his groping hand found a face beneath it, and he felt as though he had plunged his hand into a stream of hot water. He was ready to think, even, that hot rain was pouring on his fingers.

“ What's the matter with you, sir ? ” he asked faintly, in embarrassment.

He was a little reassured, however, to have found a living being at his side. What he most dreaded at this moment was to be alone. But the living being was conducting itself in the strangest way. In any case, it gave absolutely no sign of life. He knew that it was beside

him, leaning against the fence, but its utter immobility and silence assailed him with such a feeling of uncertainty that he decided to stretch out his hand again. Then he once more touched something hot and drenched with water. At that moment, he would have preferred to think that he really had plunged his hand in boiling water rather than guess the truth. For the thought that he had touched Widmar's face with his fingers was more terrifying than the wildest imagining.

"What's happened to you, sir?" he repeated, trembling, and felt a great relief as something beside him moved at last.

"In my chest . . . !" he heard a whisper of rage, and was quite surprised that someone should be in such a rage against his own chest. But immediately after, however, came a whispered explanation :

"My heart's beating like mad in my chest !" and something glimmered in the place where Widmar's face ought to be. He was doubtless wiping his face with his handkerchief. "It's gone now !" he heard after a while, and the tailor, who was wiping his fingers on his trousers, thought : "If he was sweating and that was sweat, then he was sweating from the eyes !"

"What's scraping like that ?" said Widmar's voice.

"It's nothing, sir, only the ash-tree scraping," he answered, and added humbly :

"Do you see that little light ?"

"I see it," growled Widmar.

To their right, above the fence, the tenement could be seen from the side, and the black outlines of the chimneys. In one of the rooms on the first floor a lamp was burning. Although the window was closely screened

by a yellow curtain, the light penetrated outside in a trembling band. And here at the window, against the background of the curtain, someone's shadow suddenly appeared. It was possible to distinguish angular shoulders, and a ruffled head, but it was not possible to guess whether it was the shadow of a man or a woman.

"Let's go!" brought out Widmar.

It was now the same voice so familiar to the tailor. The tailor wanted to raise his hands towards him in supplication, but he knew that Widmar would not see the gesture in the darkness, and so he made no movement. He only groaned:

"My God, please don't do anything dreadful, sir! . . ."

"Let's go!" repeated Widmar, seizing him by the jacket.

"How shameful!" heard the tailor, but he did not understand to whom this exclamation was addressed.

They advanced to the corner of the fence and turned to the left. At every second they kept knocking into some tree-trunk or stone. When they were nearly under the window, they halted.

"Quietly, sir, quietly," groaned the tailor in his expiring voice.

The angular shadow was standing motionless in the window, and only shook its head once. This gesture seemed familiar to Widmar and explained everything to him at once.

"Rebecca!" he shouted in a hoarse voice, but fortunately another gust of wind drowned his shout.

"No, sir," rose the tailor's sepulchral whisper, "it appears to be someone else . . ."

But these words did not reach Widmar's consciousness.

The motionless shadow at the window lay close to the pane, then leant towards the interior of the room. There was a crack, while at the same time the curtain was torn in two as if cut by a knife. Simultaneously, the window opened wide, the shadow leaned out half over the sill and stretched out an arm with a black, gleaming object in the fist. Then, through the howling of the wind and the scraping of the ash-tree rose a womanish cry, piercing, almost hysterical :

“ Who’s there ? I’ll shoot ! ”

Tailor Gold crouched below the fence and clung to Widmar’s knees convulsively. The band of trembling light fell just above his head. Widmar was standing in shadow. He was separated from the window by the fence and the narrow alley ; he had only to lift his arm and grasp the plank by the edge to jump over this last partition in a single bound.

“ Who’s there ? ” the womanish cry rose again, and the shadow at the window leant out still further.

The revolver could now be distinguished, the patch of the hand and the gleaming shirt-cuff. The arm extended through the window slowly described an arc in the air, as if seeking something it could not find. Then it managed to, however, and halted ; it seemed to Widmar that the barrel was directed at him.

Yet, next moment only, he realised he was standing in such shadow that he could not be seen at all from the window. Anyhow, the question lost all actuality. For the shadow leaning from the window had vanished as quickly as it had appeared. The outstretched arm with the revolver lay on the sill, the shadow stood as if undecided, then a brusque, almost cheerful growl was heard at the window. Although the moment was not in the least favourable to any comparison whatever,

this growl reminded Widmar of a "cat's grin." In just such words did he define this unexpected and cheerful purring. "As if some enormous cat were sitting in the window, giggling in disdain!" was his comparison. The shadow swayed above the sill; then it stood up and immediately after, the window shut noisily and the curtain fell back.

"Did you see, sir?" asked tailor Gold. He was still crouching and his words came in snatches as if straight from an open grave.

Widmar looked down, but could see at his feet only a bush moving in the darkness. So he said to this bush:

"I saw nothing, nothing at all, I tell you!"

"I don't know whether you could see anything more," whispered the tailor from below.

"I must!" snorted Widmar, glanced at the talking bush again, and suddenly gave it a kick. "Get up!"

Then the bush grew up before him to the size of a little tree. An unsteady band of light lay in a narrow strip on the grass, but both Widmar and the tailor, too, feared to come out of the shadow. They were shielded from the wind by the fence and the building, and the tailor could even hear Widmar's laboured and irregular breathing quite clearly. Several times as he stood listening, he caught throaty sounds, a confused series of painful sighs, and the most appalling curses. Then he grasped long, disconnected phrases, how it was absolutely imperative to get hold of a torch, that without a torch nothing could be managed properly in this filthy weather!

"Isn't there a shop anywhere near?" he heard this absurd question and a long succession of disconnected words. ". . . And I haven't my gun with me . . . like out hunting . . . with shot, with shot . . ." or something

of this kind. At that, the tailor thought Widmar had finally gone mad.

For this he had quite obvious indications. Widmar's further conduct was reminiscent of hopeless lunacy. He began panting so violently and with such an effort that it seemed to tailor Gold as if Widmar were going to burst. Then mumbling and bespattering the tailor's face with spittle, he explained to him dictatorially and impatiently that they had to go into the building at once !

" Someone at the window, that means nothing, does it ! Anybody could be at the window !" mumbled Widmar in a confused way, not knowing that his delirious exclamations were simply making the tailor dizzy in the head. " I can do the same with my hands as with my gun ! " he gasped, and what with terror and despair, the tailor was on the point of losing consciousness. Then, when Widmar seized him by the arm and dragged him along towards the gate, it seemed to the tailor as if he would be in hell itself next minute.

" Sir, my dear sir !" he stammered.

Widmar's lunacy allowed of no possible doubt. When he rushed into the street, he made for the right instead of the left, then recollected himself, and, realising he was running in the wrong direction, came back, but without rhyme or reason, went dashing across to the other side of the street. His figure could be seen no longer, and the tailor could only guess it from the movements. Then, as these halted by the barrel of lime, he made out Widmar's black legs against the greyish background of the steps. These legs, as if worn out by continual running to and fro, were now taking a rest.

" Is there a bell here ? "

The tailored shuddered and his teeth began to chatter. It was like bones clattering.

"I don't know, sir. I believe there is," he replied. With anxiety and alarm, he followed the black, shapeless bulk moving in front of him. It was Widmar's body. Yet his legs, which he could see distinctly, remained unmoving on the steps. These legs produced an almost calming effect. And then, at a certain moment, to his utter desperation, the right leg bent at the knee and lifted itself up.

"Oh, dear sir!" he groaned, forgetting himself. He was soaked through. He could feel how his shirt clung to his body. But just then, luckily or unluckily for him, something happened which he did not expect in the least.

Steps rang out in the narrow alley between the fence and the building. At the same time, Widmar's right foot again rose and moved backwards. They both thought at first that the sound of steps they heard was only the rubbing of stones rolled against each other by the wind, but soon they lost all remaining doubt. With the greatest clearness in the world, somebody, treading heavily in iron-tipped boots, was walking along the alley. And then, at once, something white glimmered in the alley.

It seemed to the tailor that Widmar leant his body forward and groaned :

"A dress!"

"Quieter, dear sir!" whispered the tailor in despairing entreaty. He did so mechanically through fear for his own skin, and only a second after did he grasp he had done something stupid.

The white shape halted in the alley and then began to approach them like an apparition. From two steps away came a hoarse bass voice :

“ What do you want ? ”

There was a moment's hesitation. The tailor, his imagination heightened by the night, felt that Widmar was cornered and did not know what to reply. When the hostile bass repeated : “ What do you want ? ” the tailor even felt that Widmar was ready to jump downstairs, and make off along the street like some terror-stricken college youth. This idea filled the tailor with a secret, malicious glee. He could hardly keep from laughing with a macabre satisfaction. “ Dear, dear, dear ! ” he thought, but his good humour suddenly vanished, for Widmar pushed him aside, and jumped down the stairs ; the tailor heard how the sand gritted under his boots. Widmar covered the white shape with his black shoulders and asked :

“ Are you the concierge by any chance ? ”

He spoke in a very calm, imperious voice, such as the tailor had never heard from him before. This voice seemed a supernatural phenomenon. “ Dear, dear, dear ! ” repeated the tailor.

“ Please excuse me,” Widmar's imperturbable voice went on in the darkness, “ but if so, perhaps you could tell me where Doctor Tamten lives here ? ”

“ Nobody lives here properly speaking,” answered the concierge evasively.

Directly after these words a little greenish-red light flared up. It was Widmar striking a match. It went out almost at once, but its brief flare was enough to show two faces close together. The tailor heaved a sigh of relief. At least they were not spectres, but human flesh and blood.

The match went out and Widmar repeated loudly :

“ It doesn't matter to me whether anyone's living here properly speaking or not,” he said in a growl. “ There's

been a sudden accident at the hospital and they're asking for surgeon Tamten."

The concierge, too, answered in a churlish growl ; his tone was even hostile.

" That's not my business."

" Take that for your trouble," said Widmar, and then the tailor heard a metallic chink. At that, the concierge said no more. For the second time a match flared up and as Widmar cupped it in his hands, it burned relatively long. The tailor saw the reddened, gleaming fingers and the faces bent towards each other. This time, the concierge's face was indifferent, and almost sleepy.

That evening, the concierge had gone out without jacket or waistcoat, simply in his shirt-sleeves. He had managed to tiptoe out of the alley and come out in front of the tenement. As he had seen a black patch that seemed to move by the barrel of lime and on the grey, stone steps, and then heard something like a whisper, he thought at first it must be a dogs' wedding. " Shoo ! " he thought of shouting, but then he realised dogs do not speak the human tongue, and that in any case, it was not dogs he could hear talking to each other in human speech. He did not imagine, however, that they were thieves.

" What do you want ? " he said, at all events, in a threatening tone, automatically rolling up his sleeves when Widmar's black, clumsy shape approached him. In the light of the match he distinguished the features, distorted, yet, at the same time, strangely calm. There was something stone-like in their expression, in so far as a stone might have an anguished expression. He felt no trust in this man.

"I don't know anything about Doctor Tamten," he answered defiantly, but then the man facing him slipped two or three coins into his hand. Such liberality testified to the nocturnal visitor's honest intentions. At the same time, an idea began to glimmer in his head.

The answer he heard was so straightforward that the rest of his doubts and distrust left him.

"Oh, well, if your wife's ill, sir, that's another matter!" the concierge repeated, and began turning his head from side to side, feeling uneasy again.

For just when he was almost completely reassured, he heard a whisper and a chattering of teeth somewhere, as if coming from a hole. It seemed to him as if someone sighed: "Ah, ah, ah!" but though he looked all around with the utmost care, he could see nothing except black haze.

"And yet I was right, there was a dog here, for it's evidently after the fleas" he growled. But the tailor, hiding behind the barrel, had again realised his imprudence and was at once silent. "Tut, tut, tut!" he said, but now only to himself. "Tut, tut, tut, he said that his wife's ill!"

"My wife's desperately ill!" Widmar continued with an air of disdainful gravity, and then all his conduct and his nocturnal visit became quite understandable to the concierge. He chinked the money, coughed, and said with churlish compassion:

"That's another matter, sir! Doctor Tamten has a room on the first storey, to the left!"— Then he obviously remembered something and added: "only please don't say I told you about it!"

The white shirt began to withdraw before Widmar's eyes, swimming through the air until it had gone so far that it recalled a small cloudlet. The easy disappearance

of the concierge, and with him the last obstacle, seemed providential to Widmar.

"It's the will of fate, evidently!" he said aloud, or maybe he only thought it. He experienced such a state of split personality that he did not know which "I" was the outer and which the inner, which thought and reflected, and which acted and spoke. "Is what I'm going to do the result of a decision based on reflection, or rather a gesture of passion?"

And again he was convinced of the ambiguous role of the human mind. On the one side he was perfectly aware that his acts were guided by a painful and irresistible emotion, on the other that all his movements were directed and controlled by reason. Quickly and effectively, his mind applied itself to the provision of motives justifying his undertaking. Even the most pathological state of so-called affection is invariably accompanied by a precise, cold reasoning. Now, as he decided to go up the stairs to surgeon Tamten's room, he himself did not know whether this resolution sprang from his desire to learn the ultimate truth, or whether it was the logical outcome of his reflections. He never found out later.

Absolutely calm, amazed even at his own calmness, he reached the porch. When he opened the entrance door, there again rose in him a kind of burning shame, but now, quickly enough and it might be said, skilfully, he rid himself of the feeling.

"I must know! Whatever the cost, I must know!" he repeated, impelled by an invincible curiosity. He had the conviction that, once he discovered what his wife was in reality, he would be cured of his passion.

"Listen, Gold," he said hoarsely, "you go first and knock at the door."

The well of the staircase smelt of damp and fresh paint. This smell was joined by another, sweetish and deathly, but Widmar paid no more attention to it.

" You go first ! " and he pushed the tailor from behind, but the tailor slipped out of his hands, it might be said he melted into thin air.

If Widmar, at this moment, had still behaved calmly and purposefully, he probably would not have managed to compel him to take a single step. The tailor had vanished somewhere on the staircase. Both of them, however, had grown used to losing each other from time to time. So Widmar knew very well he would find the tailor in a moment. But who knows whether in that moment he would have succeeded in dominating him as he had done until then. Actually, the tailor, clinging convulsively to the balustrade, was hanging over it, ready to hurl himself headlong downstairs. Then he slipped on a stair, and half-lying, half-hanging in air, was near his last breath.

Had Widmar struck a match, it would not have been surprising for him to see a frozen corpse at his feet. But it was then that, guided by instinct rather than by genuine anger, Widmar, heedless of his surroundings, began dragging his feet up the stairs, making an incredible din. He was muttering and mumbling quite loudly, and his muttering rose up the stairway in an overwhelming torrent of senseless words :

" shot ! shot ! It's the will of fate ! He said that medical ethics ! shot ! And where's her love ? and that seeming truth in her eyes ! " "

Then he cried at the top of his voice, and echo repeated his words with voluptuous readiness :

“ A woman, after such an operation, is incapable of love ! ”

Widmar's way of behaving, this nightmare of invisible but deafening movements, and words broken by their own echo, had a galvanising effect on the tailor. He sprang up at once, as if after an injection of vivifying elixir. Standing on the stairs, he brandished his hands violently in the darkness, expressing by turns despair and piteous entreaty. There was a veritable miracle of resurrection on the stairs. Even his whisper stopped being the sepulchral whisper of the dying.

“ Sir, dear sir ! ” he spoke quickly and with unexpected presence of mind. “ I'll do everything, but don't shout, be quiet . . . ! ” He almost threw himself into Widmar's arms, and for a while they stood touching each other, until Widmar pushed him away.

“ You go first ! ” he whispered.

Somewhere deep within he had a vague contempt for himself, but once again he swallowed the feeling with ease. At the same time he caught himself searching vainly through his pockets for some hard or pointed object. But he had nothing except his own hairy fists.

“ That'll do ! ” he growled with criminal recklessness. He felt such a concentrated strength within himself that he was sure of winning in any struggle. His muscles, soft and out of training, had become as if of granite. At this moment, he could have measured himself successfully against a dozen lovers.

Probably man's physical strength does not depend so much on the fitness and size of his biceps as on the lack of every reflex. A blow acquires its full force only if it is not preceded by reflection. That is why, in the majority of cases, the fool is physically stronger than the intelligent man. This also explains the vigour of the madman,

whose strength during attacks of fury seems superhuman. Such was Widmar's experience when, his mind in complete confusion, but concentrated on his despair, he seized the tailor by the waist, knowing that only one nervous movement more would leave nothing of the tailor but a damp pulp. Nothing mattered to him any more. The darkness seemed no longer to exist, the stairs he mounted flowed of themselves under his feet, while in front of him he carried and pushed the tailor, who stumbled and fell, but nevertheless climbed higher and higher.

"Quiet!" he whispered with thoughtless obstinacy, "Quiet!" And then, when they were on the landing, the tailor slid out of his hands. Then all fell silent on the stairs, and nothing could be heard but heavy breathing.

"Really must be more careful," thought Widmar, coming to his senses. What contributed most towards sobering him down was a narrow, yellow ray of light.

It shone above their heads, cleaving the dark space like a thread of gold. It was a ray showing at the edge of the badly-fitting door.

Only then, as he came to himself, did Widmar become aware of the uproar they had been making on the staircase. The echo of their steps, of their struggle, the noise of their raised voices reached his ear after a moment's delay. All the sounds had already died away in the house: darkness and silence reigned in the well of the staircase, but in Widmar's ears resounded the frightening echo of the noisy scene that had just taken place. For a second he lost his breath. He then thought, however, that if this infernal din on the stairs had not so far provoked any incident, such as the sudden opening of a door, it was because it called up such a terrible alarm behind

the door that it paralysed the people there. Or, worse still, the people behind the door were so occupied with each other that they had not heard anything!

This last supposition was quite probable and haunted him relentlessly. The darkness about him became blood-red, and he would have hurled himself at the door, his hand was outstretched to grasp the handle, but just then he heard a rhythmic and placid knocking, and drew back against the wall.

He could still see nothing. The yellow ray was cut in the middle by a black patch. He guessed that this was tailor Gold's hand. Nobody answered the knocking and it was absolutely silent behind the door.

A series of heart-rending pictures slid through Widmar's imagination. He saw everything which might, at this moment, be happening on the bed. Familiar and intimate gestures, caresses and words, transposed to a strange bed seemed to him an insult and torture. He almost prayed within himself, in the most blasphemous phrases, to hasten the passage of time, which was lengthening to an eternity.

"Quicker, quicker! To the devil! Quicker, hell!"

The knocking began again. And then, in a state of almost bestial stupor, Widmar heard a voice:

"Come in!"

It was a quick, decisive voice, and in it vibrated a note of joy. "Why of joy?" wondered Widmar.

"Come in!" was heard behind the door, and one of the folding-doors opened wide. It was not shut! It was enough for the tailor to lean lightly on the handle for it to open noiselessly.

"Come in!" somebody repeated for the third time,

and now there was no room for doubt that this somebody was impatient and joyful.

The first thing that sprang to Widmar's eyes was the empty bed. Nobody was in bed, but evidently someone had been lying there a while before, for the pillow was crumpled. Then he inspected the whole room with an inquisitorial eye. The second thing that sprang to his eyes was the window screened with a yellow curtain, and there, below the window, the figure of Doctor Tamten, sitting on a chair.

At the opening of the door surgeon Tamten stood up alertly, it might even be said he jumped off his chair as if startled. But before he did so, Widmar was able to observe that he was sitting motionless, in a position bespeaking a deep reverie. He was sitting on a chair with his legs stretched out in front of him, holding his head in his hands. In the stoop of his shoulders was something new that Widmar had so far not known, nor even suspected in the surgeon. The curve of the hunched shoulders seemed to symbolise some inner distress. That, at least, was Widmar's impression, although he remarked it heedlessly in passing. Equally rapidly, and with some surprise, he decided that there existed between himself and the surgeon a certain resemblance impossible to deny. It probably resided in the surgeon's general atmosphere, if not to say aura, as it could not, of course, exist in his physical appearance, so different and characteristic.

This likeness was so striking that, had Widmar not possessed the feeling of his own ego, he could have imagined it was not surgeon Tamten but Widmar who sat in the room. This amusing idea, however, had no effect and no importance, like some pointless statement of facts.

The surgeon started up from his chair, the pearl in his tie shone with a sinister glow, and his patent leather shoes glowed with a fiery-red gleam. But the way in which the surgeon had jumped, in spite of his agility and apparent alertness, presented all the signs of fatigue and what goes with it, the effort to overcome this fatigue. His movements were far too decided, and this exaggeration betrayed their lack of spontaneity. He shook his head so that the black, bushy hair fell on his forehead, and, weary and delighted, cried :

“ Come in ! ”

He even stretched out his arms, and then suddenly stood rigid, dumbfounded.

The door, which had opened wide, began slowly shutting in front of his very nose. All he could see was somebody's arm, which divided the door into two parts and, grasping the handle, shut it as cautiously and carefully as if it were a shield. The surgeon had not been able to move or lower his outstretched arms before the door was already shut, and there remained no tangible proof of the truth of this inconceivable adventure. Only from below rose a long-drawn-out noise reminiscent of the clatter of several feet running downstairs. However, this noise mingled with the wind at once, and who knows whether the wind was not the real cause. It plunged into the stairway and howled in an evil, warning howl. In the street it overturned the barrel of lime and rolled it along the pavement, almost crushing tailor Gold.

The tailor was sobbing and wailing as if at a funeral :

“ Sir, dear sir ! ”

The darkness stifled him to such a degree that he lost hope of ever seeing the light of day again. A black, shapeless bulk kept circling round him, he knew Widmar still did not want to leave him, and this dark nightmare

was stifling him. And so he did not credit his own ears and senses when he heard parting words and felt something like a clap on the shoulder.

Yet Widmar really was saying goodbye, if it is possible to apply the term to two or three invectives and strong blows on the place where, by day, the tailor's neck ought to be. This strange way of leave-taking resulted rather from force of habit than any genuine fury. For in Widmar's soul everything was momentarily at rest and appeased.

It was the first reaction, the first allaying of torture he had experienced, leaving him empty and unable to feel any further emotion whatever.

When Widmar was convinced the bed was empty, and that there was nobody in the room but surgeon Tamten, he experienced an overwhelming relief, and at the same time lost his remaining will-power and strength. He could not discover a shadow of the hoped-for joy in himself, though it was evident that today, at least, his wife had not betrayed him. But perhaps she had not betrayed him at all?

In any case his hatred and rage against the doctor became pointless. "I must be careful and hold on till the end," he thought mechanically. The surgeon himself had no interest for him; why then take an irrevocable step which would not only fail to clear up the matter, but on the contrary complicate it and afford his wife the opportunity of blotting out every trace.

He rolled down the stairs along with the tailor, and in the street began gasping painfully and with evident perplexity. Above all, he felt for his wife an inexpressibly erotic tenderness and gratitude for the way in which everything had happened, and for the probability that his torture was due only to the meanness of his suspicion.

" Rebecca ! " he cried in his heart, while, at the same time, clutching the tailor by the neck, he assailed him with orders and threats.

" Keep your eye on this affair tomorrow, will you, it's got to be finished with ! " he ended.

The tailor shouted something at the top of his voice in reply, but the tempest stifled every sound.

" Don't forget, don't forget ! " cried Widmar behind him. Then he turned and went up the street. At one place he barged into a telegraph pole which was standing askew against a house fence. It was at this very spot in the afternoon, he remembered, that he had seen labourers at work and the electrician Isaac Gold. " But this pole wasn't there yesterday ? " he thought, and went on, taking care where he put his feet. He might just as well have walked along with his eyes shut. On every side unknown and unexpected objects sprang up before him, a tree-stump, a stone, a barrel, a broken carriage wheel, even.

" I can't recollect such a storm," he muttered dully. He had grown indifferent to nearly everything. " Rebecca ! " he sighed. Slowly the relief in his soul increased, and he began to bless his wife for this evening's happy outcome. However, when he reached home he remembered something that straightway deprived him of this blessed state of equilibrium.

He remembered that there was nobody in the room except surgeon Tamten ; that was an undeniable fact. He remembered that the bed was empty ; that, too, was an undeniable fact. But he suddenly recalled that on the bed there had been lying some red object which he had noticed at once, but to which, unfortunately, he had not attached the necessary importance ; even, strangely enough, forgetting about it. Now, on the contrary, he

pictured it in imagination in all its clearness. He saw, he knew, that the red object lying on the bed was his wife's scarf.

Next day tailor Gold got up at dawn. Birds were twittering, yellow clouds whirled over the ash-tree. The tailor went out into the yard and stared in a melancholy way at the sky. The wind never ceased.

"Tut, tut, tut!" exclaimed the tailor disapprovingly, gazing into the air. Then his son Boruch nudged Angela with his elbow and said quaintly:

"Daddy's looking at the sky like my kite. He's going to fly away quick!"

"You're a liar!" cried Angela, and burst into tears.

At that same time, surgeon Tamten was being wakened for it was Friday, and that was operating day at the hospital.

At that same time, Widmar returned to his study from his wife's bedroom, where he had spent an abominable night of love. Tailor Gold, surgeon Tamten and Widmar were thinking at the same time of one and the same woman.

It was early morning. Workmen were coming out of the power station to go to work along with the switch-board operator Isaac Gold. They were in navy blue overalls and navy blue, baggy trousers, and from their trouser pockets protruded the necks of bottles and black tools. The previous day they had made an electrical installation in a villa halfway between the tailor's house and Widmar's. They had dug in a pole and today they had come to connect the villa with the network by leading two connections to the street mains. The main line current had a tension of three thousand volts, while in the

line designed to provide the houses the tension was normal, two hundred and twenty.

So, on Friday, at seven o'clock, the workmen were already at work, surgeon Tamten was splashing under his shower, the tailor stood unmoving in the yard, and Widmar decided to have another meeting with surgeon Tamten. This Friday, abounding in tragic happenings for them all, was to bring the surgeon a succession of failures. Indeed, it was, in his hospital service, a surgically fatal day.

This fatal day, surgeon Tamten had eleven operations to perform. The first seven were clean and easy, the following four were infected and complicated. At eight o'clock in the morning, surgeon Tamten put on his mask.

He stood over the operating-table ; through the glass roof could be seen a grey, cloudy sky. Surgeon Tamten had to perform three nerve-extracting operations, which he contemptuously called "barrel-organ." The patient lay stretched out, stupefied with morphine and sighing continually. The assistant, house-physician Boguski, sighed painfully. The operational field, which was above the patient's left collar-bone, had been rendered insensitive by a one per cent. novocaine solution ; the first superficial cut of the knife caused no pain and yet, on hearing the cut skin grate, the patient groaned.

"You can't feel anything, why are you pretending to ?" said the surgeon.

However, a moment after, when he had found the nerve, he said : "Now this will hurt you." He cut the nerve, the patient howled. "Where does it hurt ?" asked the surgeon in a calm, matter-of-fact voice.

"In the diaphragm!" howled the patient. He writhed, but his legs and arms were tied down with linen straps. The sisters and the attendant Paul held his head and elbows.

"A trifle! A trifle!" said the surgeon almost gaily. He rolled the nerve round the forceps. The nerve, a long, white string, came creeping out of the open wound, little by little the surgeon wound it with the forceps as with a handle, the patient's groans filled the whole theatre.

"Barrel-organ, absolutely," said Tamten. "I wind here, and he sings there! . . ."

The nerve came away at last with a soft plop.

"There!" said surgeon Tamten, putting in the stitches.

The patient was gasping. "Next!" cried Tamten, going to the window.

At the same time they led a second patient into the operating-theatre. He was in his shirt and blue dressing-gown.

"Take off his dressing-gown and shirt," said the matron.

Stripped to the waist, the patient sat on the operating-table. He was shaking, and on his back were the red patches of nervous excitement. He was bound to the table with the white linen straps, and again an anæsthetising injection of novocaine was administered, this time above the right clavicle. Dark, curling clouds passed above the glass ceiling, surgeon Tamten came back from the window and changed his gloves.

"Barrel-organ again," he said.

Just then a door banged down below. It was Widmar coming up the staircase. He had such a strange air that the sister who met him by chance on the stairs asked :

"Are you ill? Sit down on the bench."

"I'm not ill," gasped Widmar. "I've come to see Doctor Tamten."

"The doctor's operating," replied the sister. She brushed Widmar with her white, starched cap, and disappeared into the laryngological room.

Widmar was left alone in the corridor; patients in blue dressing-gowns were drifting about. Widmar sat down on a bench and one of the patients came up to him.

"Is it your wife they're operating on for appendicitis?" asked the patient.

Widmar gave him a sideways look.

"It's not your business!" he retorted, adding gloomily: "I'm not married."

Each extraction of the diaphragmatic nerve, phrenico-exhairesis, lasted about seven minutes. At nine o'clock, then, surgeon Tamten stood at the operating-table, already performing his fourth successive operation. He was now operating on an appendix, and saw before him a woman's abdomen covered with towels, and repeated every two or three seconds,:

"Swab, ligature, artery forceps, swab, gauze, ligature."

At twenty past nine the patient was carried from the operating-theatre on a stretcher. The surgeon held the appendix in his hand and showed it to the house-physician Boguski, who was assisting:

"It was already inflamed," he said.

On the thin, yellowish-pink ball violet patches could be seen. The surgeon cut the appendix with a lancet; there was a brownish mass inside.

"No stones," explained surgeon Tamten, "only excrement."

He took the gloves off his tired, reddened hands and waved them in the air.

Meanwhile they were wheeling a grey-haired old woman into the operating-theatre.

"You've had no vomiting?" asked Tamten, and remembered he had asked Rebecca the same question a year ago. It was then that his torture began. In the grey-haired woman, darkened by age, he saw the image of his beloved. He painted the abdomen with iodine and shuddered with apprehension. "A trifle, a trifle," he said to reassure himself.

"Count, please!" he said to the patient. "Count!" he repeated, and only then noticed she was already under.

"Swab, retractor, ligature!" he repeated. He caught himself performing the operation as in a dream.

Meanwhile, Widmar was sitting in the corridor, waiting. At last he stood up impatiently and tapped at the door of the operating-theatre with his stick. The door was covered with felt and a curtain of white oil-cloth, and the blows were muffled as they fell. An astonished patient ran up to Widmar and asked:

"What are you doing?"

Widmar brandished his cane.

"I want to go in there!" he said. Then, as if coming to his senses:

"I'll wait," he said indifferently, and sat down once more on the bench. Then he began studying his surroundings with the air of a man who keeps on making new discoveries at every step.

It was a curious, psychological phenomenon. Up till then the whole outer side of life had seemed unreal to him, drowned in a fog of jealousy. Now everything was reversed: his personal life, his wife's betrayal, the

extra-uterine pregnancy, Tamten, the tailor, the window—seemed to him completely non-existent things. On the other hand, another reality sprang up with an intense, irrefutable actuality. A man at death's door sees the ordinary, everyday things surrounding him with an implacable sharpness. A man near personal catastrophe experiences

Surgeon Tamten, for the first time since he had practised medicine, realised that his surgical technique could not compensate for his lack of medical inspiration. The instruments were blunt and clumsy, the patient stretched out in front of him on the table seemed to him already dead. "Rebecca!" he thought, chilled with apprehension. Without rhyme or reason, his private life materialised in the operating-theatre, seeming to mix with the blood of the sick old woman on whom he was performing appendectomy.

"Ligature," he said, calmly in spite of everything, and the automatic calmness of his voice restored a real calm within him. As if with the eyes of a third person, he saw all that was going on around him with an extraordinary clarity. There were two surgeons: one was performing the operation, the other looked on with a critical and distrustful eye. The second surgeon, an inanimate, divine creature, could see before him only lifeless things that were nevertheless moving in accordance with some hidden, mechanical law. In the same way, the man at death's door sees the ordinary, everyday happenings surrounding him with unusual clarity. In the same way the man near personal catastrophe experiences the outer world. Old Widmar in the same way observed with surprise the man who made these extraordinary discoveries, that he was sitting in a hospital corridor; in the corridor patients were drifting about, Widmar

looked at the grey walls, the glass windows of the medical cupboards ranged along the walls, and the walls, like the cupboards, like the patients, seemed an extraordinary phenomenon.

A clock hung over the door, the hands showed ten past ten. Surgeon Tamten had been performing a simple operation for appendicitis for more than half an hour already.

The doors of the general ward opened, and through the doorway Widmar saw a large room, in which stood six or eight beds. On one of them, nearest the doorway, a patient was lying on his back. His face was yellow, his nose sharp, jutting, his eyes closed.

In the next bed sat another patient with a bandaged head. From the same ward a patient with a stiff arm, bent at the elbow, came out accompanied by a sister. He was pale and anxious.

"Sit down for the time being on the bench," said the sister to him.

The patient sat down beside Widmar, and Widmar, with a precise exactitude, studied his dressing-gown; the clock over the door chimed half-past ten.

The sister stood nearby, while with a rapid step the hospital gynæcologist crossed the corridor. A few minutes later he came back and asked the sister:

"Is the superintendent operating?"

Widmar heard her reply in a whisper:

"He's been doing an appendix for an hour, nearly."

"Nearly an hour?" exclaimed the gynæcologist under his breath. He evidently guessed something disquietening; he fastened up his doctor's coat to the last button, and disappeared inside the operating-theatre . . .

"They had to operate on me at nine o'clock," began

the patient with the stiff arm, "and yet it's eleven already." He was agitated and talkative. That was the effect of the pre-operational injection of morphine on him. He told Widmar that his arm had been broken and that the bone was growing together wrongly. "Now it's got to be broken again."

Another quarter of an hour went by. At last the attendant Paul came out of the operating-theatre. He shook his head.

"Phew! Terribly hot!" he complained to Widmar, and beckoned to the patient with the stiff arm.

"Your turn! Go into the theatre!"

"I want to see the superintendent!" said Widmar, and rushed to the door, but on the threshold he collided with the gynæcologist who was coming out and with medico Rubinski. The gynæcologist was saying:

"More than an hour for a simple appendicitis?"

"Everything's going wrong!" replied Rubinski softly.

The door was shut in Widmar's face. He could only manage to make out through the crack that surgeon Tamten, all in white, was sitting by the window in the dressing-room. His head in its mask was bowed on his breast, while his hands hung down by his knees almost to the floor.

The clock struck half-past eleven. Widmar was left alone again in the corridor, the sister said to him:

"Will you wait? The superintendent's very busy just now!"

He waited apathetically. Then a cry rose in the operating-theatre, and Widmar started up on his bench. It was a yell from the patient, on whom they had begun operating before he had been finally put to sleep. It was a fatal day.

"A fatal day," whispered the sister in the first room to the attendant as he boiled the instruments. The attendant shook his head.

Surgeon Tamten was leaning for the sixth time over the operating table.

"Bring me a stool," he said at last. He sat down, but sitting was uncomfortable, and so, after a moment, he pushed the stool away from him with his galosh-shod foot, and stood once more bending at the waist.

He had now reached the broken bone. The cubital bone was broken in two places, and to his terror, surgeon Tamten suddenly saw Rebecca Widmar's face on this bone. Fortunately, the face vanished after a moment. But Tamten could no longer find out the normal position of the bone.

"X-ray!" he said drily.

The sister brought him the X-ray, and the surgeon went to the window with her. The sister laid the black photograph on the glass, the surgeon stood behind her shoulder with his arms outstretched in the air, and for a second he looked at the plate against the light. Then he turned on his heel and once more bent over the wound.

The shining drill turned in his hands, the surgeon was boring the broken bone, the bone showed a slight crack under the drill.

"Ough!" sighed the assistant Rubinski, and threw a look of understanding at the matron. Surgeon Tamten was silent, he was drilling the bone in another place. Then something burst. It was a metal suture that had burst at the ligature!

"Forceps," said the surgeon patiently, though he knew he had again lost a portion of precious time. "What are you sighing for?" he asked bitingly, and medico Rubinski reddened to the ears.

At this moment they were bringing up on a stretcher from the second floor a patient with a serious neglected hernia. Only after twenty minutes did Widmar see the doors of the operating-theatre open again, and the patient to whom he had spoken not long before being wheeled out. The patient was asleep. As he was pushed past the bench, Widmar smelt a heavy stink of ether.

"How much longer shall I have to wait?" he asked the sister.

The sister took pity on him and said :

"I'll go and find out at once."

But in the operating-theatre, she saw the superintendent sitting in the corner by the window once more. His masked face was bowed on his breast, his hands, freshly gloved, hung down to the tiled floor. He was hunched up and seemed to the sister like a child. She had not the courage to go up to him. Retreating silently backwards, she tiptoed behind the door. Anyhow she would not have had enough time to exchange even a couple of words with him. For at that very moment the matron called from the other room :

"He's asleep!" and surgeon Tamten started up on his chair, as if there were some hidden spring in him, and, slopping in his galoshes, almost ran to the operating-theatre.

On the table, distended, monstrous, deformed, was the abdomen of the hernia patient, an old man, bulky and fat.

"Scissors!" said Tamten with fictitious gaiety. Then, like lightning: "Gauze, forceps, ligature, forceps, retractor, ligature! . . ."

It was a fatal day. The peritoneum proved to be quite rotten, and no suture would hold to it. It melted away between the fingers, and kept shredding into rags. Surgeon Tamten thrust the patient's bowels into the

abdominal cavity, and began sewing up the peritoneum, but instead of the peritoneum there were only shreds, rags, rosy, decomposed tatters. The house-surgeon Rubinski heard a kind of grinding sound rise from under surgeon Tamten's mask. It was a fatal day, it was a day when surgeon Tamten had but to touch a living body for it to be changed at once into rottenness and dust, for it to scatter under his hands in bleeding shreds, in putrefaction !

It was a quarter past twelve, and still the peritoneum could not be sewn together. In the corridor Widmar was sitting as if petrified.

"Ough !" sighed the assistant Rubinski, and threw a look of understanding at the matron.

"What are you sighing for ?" growled Tamten sharply.

The house-physician Boguski went into the theatre in mask and gown, and felt the patient's pulse. Meanwhile, down below on the ground floor, they had already given the pre-operational injection to a patient with pulmonary empyema, while into the hospital courtyard came a cart in which they were bringing a peasant suffering from an abdominal abscess. It was a serious and urgent case. The patient suffered from vomitings of blood. Surgical aid was needed at once. Nurses and attendants were busy round the cart in the yard, and after a moment someone went to fetch doctor Boguski from the operating-theatre.

The old man went down the stairs ; on the way he jostled Widmar, who had got up from his bench, thinking it was doctor Tamten running along. Old doctor Boguski ran out into the yard and took hold of the peasant's wrist. At once, from the thready, fading pulse he knew the hæmorrhage was increasing. Boguski immediately ordered that the sick man should be prepared for an

operation, and thereupon, the already compressed operating-day schedule became over-congested.

The operating schedule had been arranged the previous evening by the surgeon. The latter knew by heart the succession of the operations and could estimate almost exactly the duration of each of them. But from the very start everything went upside down, and when, about half-past twelve, the patient with the abdominal ulcer was brought in, a patient interposed between the seventh and eighth operations, surgeon Tamten realised that the day's arrangements were hopelessly upset. He remained stooping over the abdominal cavity, which he simply could not patch up, the peritoneum kept slipping through his fingers along with the multiplying moments; and it was just then the surgeon was informed that the house-physician Boguski was preparing a peasant suffering from "*ulcus ventriculi*" for an operation. The surgeon answered, only half-conscious:

"All right, in a minute . . . Give me clips, please!"

The clock in the corridor struck one. "I can't wait any longer!" repeated Widmar gloomily, but he stayed on, unmoving and apathetic. Everything that went on outside him kept on crushing him with its dreadful clarity and its glare, it hurt his sight, his hearing, his smell. He saw down the long, grey hospital corridors, patients were drifting about in these corridors, patients with crutches, with sticks, with feet, hands, heads bandaged in white gauze, each one of them smelling of ether, iodine, illness.

After sixteen minutes of torture, the peritoneum was successfully sewn, the surgeon, moving his legs with difficulty, left the table, put on fresh gloves, and a moment later, for the eighth time, stood bent at the waist, leaning over the anæsthetised peasant. Immediately

the peritoneum was opened, the blood burst out. It was a perforation, that is to say, the abscess had eaten through the walls of the abdomen, the blood flooded swabs, towels, the sheet and the whole operating-table. With a frozen obstinacy, the surgeon tried to arrest the hæmorrhage, but the blood gushed and spurted more and more.

“A trifle, a trifle! . . .” he murmured like an echo.

But his work was no trifle. This fatal day, the arresting of the hæmorrhage and the operation on the burst ulcer lasted for an hour and a half. And when, just past two o'clock, surgeon Tamten went with his assistant into the second operating-theatre, where only filthy, suppurating operations were performed, this fatal day was being discussed throughout nearly the whole hospital.

“He could hardly stop the hæmorrhage!” said someone beside Widmar, but Widmar sat motionless, musing on betrayal and jealousy.

In the filthy operating-theatre, ready for the operation, lay the woman suffering from a pulmonary abscess. At the first puncture, or otherwise the exploratory puncture, the surgeon established that the abscess was between the sixth and fifth ribs. The patient was placed on her right side, surgeon Tamten said to Boguski: “Please keep a watch on the heart!” and grasped a scalpel in his hand. He cut calmly, surely, with verve almost.

And then, to his stupefaction, he became convinced that there was no abscess between the sixth and fifth ribs.

The ill luck of that day attained its apogee. He concentrated entirely on a small segment of the pleura, on an abscess which, for some unknown reason, was situated about a third of an inch higher than it ought to have been.

“Pulse good,” said Boguski, while Widmar, sitting

like a statue in the corridor, moved at last and lit a cigarette.

Then he began strolling up and down, and halting at the doors of the theatre, hidden behind the white oil-cloth, looked at the clock. "I'll tell him everything I know about his bachelor-flat," he thought. "I'm interested to see whether he'll persist in his denial. Bah! I'll even confess my attack on his life!" He lit another cigarette.

The hands on the clock were already sliding towards three o'clock. Behind the theatre doors everything was silent as the tomb, the doors were shut fast, and not a sound came through them.

At the bottom of the corridor a sick youth came out of the bathroom. Behind him walked an attendant carrying an enamel basin and a bottle. A bell rang. Someone in the general ward shouted:

"Attendant, I've been waiting for a basin half an hour!"

"I'm bringing it," answered the attendant.

An odour of bed-pans prevailed. At the same time, another attendant was taking round dinners to some of the patients. It was quiet in the corridor, the patients scattered to the wards. Widmar stood in front of the theatre doors and smoked cigarette after cigarette. The clock struck three times, then

Widmar threw down his cigarette and stared before him, uncomprehending. The doors covered in white oil-cloth opened in front of him, a sister came running out of the theatre, and the doors at once swept to with a click behind her. With a rustling of stiffly starched skirts, the sister passed quickly in front of him, her lips whispering:

“Heavens! Heavens! Where can the camphor have gone?”

After a moment she came rushing back, limping strangely, breaking the neck of an ampoule on the way. Then the doors opened again and Widmar saw before him the dressing-room, in which there was not a soul. In spite of that, someone shouted in the dressing-room:

“Artificial respiration! . . .”

“Whose voice is that?” Widmar wondered, and he sweated with indefinable terror. He recognised this hoarse, strangled voice as the voice of Doctor Tamten.

“What’s happened?” he wondered. The sister disappeared into the dressing room, the doors were left half-open. A metallic click could be heard and rapid steps on the floor, as if someone were running up and down the theatre. Then, in an altered, hissing voice, surgeon Tamten cried: “Strophantine!” and at once a second, older voice—“Doctor Boguski, for sure!” thought Widmar—repeated: “Strophantine! Injection in the heart!” A third voice, a woman’s, already at the door, repeated: “Strophantine!” and the sister came running out into the corridor for the second time.

Somewhere down below a strident bell rang without stopping, nurses came running up from all the wards. The sister came back, carrying in her hand a long, slender syringe. Immediately after, the doors shut and Widmar could hear nothing more.

“What’s happened?” he asked one of the nurses, but she stood silent.

A few moments passed. It was quiet. And then something happened which Widmar always remembered afterwards with a frozen shudder.

The operating-theatre doors opened with such force that they might have been blown up with dynamite, and

Tamten rushed out into the doorway. He was covered in blood from head to foot. In his blood-stained hand he held his gauze mask, while on his head was a white cap, like a cook's. From beneath the cap straggled his black, dripping hair. Surgeon Tamten's upper lip kept twitching like a hare's, the surgeon grimaced suddenly, and smiling, went quickly off down the corridor towards his apartment.

Widmar came to himself and ran after him. "It doesn't matter, what's it got to do with me!" he thought. He overtook him and with repugnance seized him by his blood-stained sleeve.

"I know where your bachelor flat is!" he exclaimed.

The surgeon, lifting his upper lip, looked at him in bewilderment. "A skeleton in overalls, absolutely!" flashed into Widmar's head. Then the surgeon pushed him away with all his strength.

"What?" he asked, stuttering. "Wha-at? You see, the abscess had shifted quite near the heart! . . . You see! . . ."

Then he yelled something in Latin and disappeared into the sisters' refectory.

"What's happened?" stammered Widmar. He saw Rubinski and went towards him with the same question. But the medico was in a great hurry.

"She died under the knife," he threw out as he rushed off.

When Widmar, utterly disconcerted, came out of the hospital, he met the house-physician Boguski on the steps. Not even greeting him, he wanted to avoid him, but the old man barred his path with unexpected firmness.

"I'm very sorry," he said. "I saw you waiting a long time for the superintendent. Couldn't I be of any

assistance to you?" He was obviously abashed at his own audacity, and added: "As a doctor."

"Is he mocking me?" wondered Widmar. He replied sullenly that he had an entirely personal affair with Tamten.

"Oh, I beg your pardon, I beg your pardon!" The old man grew even more abashed, and for some wholly obscure reason began telling Widmar about his enormous medical experience. "Do you know," he informed him, finally, "that a glance at a patient is enough for an old doctor to recognise the nature of his illness? For example, there's the hysterical type, which I can guess at once."

Widmar leant against one of the folding doors.

"Perhaps you see a future patient?" he asked.

"God forbid! although" The old man reddened: ". . . . although I believe I can guess the nature of your illness."

The attendant Paul passed them. He was carrying a mattress on his shoulders. The mattress reminded Widmar of a bed, the bed reminded him of everything, and at that he had made a final decision. Thinking that at seven o'clock in the evening, as soon as the tailor had informed him of his wife's rendezvous with surgeon Tamten, he would take a weapon and catch them in the act, he asked:

"I'm interested to know your diagnosis?"

"Very common," said the doctor, lowering his eyes. "Unfortunately, every man suffers from it more or less I'd call this illness a kind of helplessness." Gazing at the floor, he said that in general there is no tragedy on earth; there are only tragedians more or less helpless.

"And that's the worst!" he cried with pathetic

sadness. "Because they're so helpless, because they're so helpless . . . !"

From his whole behaviour and way of speaking, it followed that the gossip circulating in the little city had reached his old ears, and for barely understandable reasons he was trying to hint as much to Widmar. He was so expansive that he even avowed openly what he thought of love.

"A very beautiful emotion!" he sighed and nodded his head approvingly. "Very!" Widmar looked at him gloomily. "What does he want from me?" he wondered, while organising in his head the plan of action for that evening.

"A most beautiful emotion," repeated Boguski musingly, "but for idlers, you know. Eh?"

Some patients from the tubercular ward were making their way towards the dressing-room. A low-voiced conversation could be heard and a continual cough going from one patient to another. Widmar looked at this file of consumptives with an ever-increasing interest. It was as if a little door opened on to the fresh air in the heart of the closeness of the last few days. The oddest thing of all was that, in this case, the otherwise lamentable procession of consumptives played the part of a healthy draught of air. However, Widmar could not understand this at all.

"They're going for their arsenic injection," said Boguski by way of explanation, and then added, in the tone of a man who is trying to convince himself in vain, "A very beautiful and serious emotion." And he added again with a moving honesty: "Serious, but for women, especially for women. Eh?"

Gently and briefly he described how a man who comes into long-continued and personal contact with human

unhappiness (" You know—death—you know—illness ! . . . ") ends by attaching no importance to his private griefs.

" In reality, these private sufferings are the result of man's delight in tragedies. And yet, sir, a love betrayed is not the same thing as being run over by a car ! "

This unexpected conclusion would have made anybody laugh, but Widmar only raised his eyebrows in surprise.

" What a plague ! What a devilish invention ! " the senior house-physician almost shouted. He brandished his arm and stamped his feet with indignation and terror. It seemed that the idea of motor-cars gave him internal spasms. He turned a little pale and his eyes rolled up. " A broken brake, a punctured tyre, and . . . a corpse ! A corpse on the spot ! Always excessive speeds ! But it's a crime ! Myself, I'd only allow them to go at a speed of ten miles an hour, like a pair of horses ! Why more ? More—death ! . . . "

He was comic and disarming in his legendary terror before these " diabolical machines. " " Such a machine carries you at a speed of sixty miles an hour straight to Beelzebub's red-hot frying-pan, before you can manage to look round ! . . . "

" Don't make a tragedy out of cars, doctor, " said Widmar with coarse triumph. He did not even pity old Boguski, to whom his remark caused evident annoyance. The house-physician appeared dejected. He shook his grey head and wanted to say something in his own justification, but Widmar was already in the hospital yard. " Stupid old man ! " he grumbled.

To reach the end of the yard he had to take about fifty steps. These fifty steps were his most genuine experience just then. He became absorbed in nature and the people he met in the alleys, patients for the most

part, as something extraordinarily alive and concrete. He looked at everything piercingly. And if seeing in life the so-called strangeness of existence seems meritorious and difficult to anyone, Widmar was convinced that, in this case, it was infinitely more difficult, more glorious, and stranger, even, to see the simplicity and the truth of life. Along with this he felt the smallness and the insignificance of his "I." The event of which he had been a witness at the hospital preoccupied him, and the death of the woman, an unknown stranger, came into his life like some personal misfortune. The gloomy procession of patients kept going through his head, replacing the platoon of detestable lovers. *Kyrie eleison! Kyrie eleison!* he said, like an invocation. But, this time again, he was totally unaware of the process going on in his mind. As long as he was in the hospital yard—the hospital had cast a spell on him—he was unconsciously preoccupied with the gravity and pathos of this human unit in its struggling and in its dying. But it was enough for him to pass beyond the fence for the spell to lose its power. He shook himself and straightway forgot about all the patients and operations that really did not concern him at all.

Surgeon Tamten, covered in the blood of a recently butchered woman, in spite of the esteem he inspired and the authority he preserved after this accident, would yet be the victim of his own and another's disloyalty. "This evening, everything will be finished!" cried Widmar to himself, looking at his watch.

It was nearly four o'clock. The tailor declared that, through the window, he had heard Rebecca promise surgeon Tamten to come and see him in his bachelor-flat about seven o'clock. Widmar's plan was simple and naive: about six o'clock in the evening, he would pretend to go to town. In reality, he would hide somewhere in the

garden, to make sure that his wife left home. Immediately after, he would go back into the house and wait for tailor Gold, who would at once let him know the rendezvous. Then, with him or alone, he would run to Doctor Tamten's bachelor-flat, for it was not far away, just behind the great statesman's statue in Batory Street. This distance could easily be covered in five minutes.

As he left the hospital Widmar decided to see tailor Gold once more, to make final arrangements with him. He opened the gate and went into the yard which, after the happenings of the previous evening, he regarded as something enormous and black. By day, it looked entirely different. It was dreadfully small and dirty, there was not a single bush the whole length of the surrounding fence, not a tree, not a stone to be stumbled against. It was difficult to imagine why, the day before, everything had seemed so peculiar, full of obstacles and bristling with barricades.

The tenement likewise seemed to have changed its outlines. The red colour of the bricks gave it a cheerful and almost welcoming aspect. It was only the window screened with the yellow curtain that still preserved something of the previous evening's atmosphere. Against the uninhabited background of the house—in the other windows the glass was daubed with lime—it stood out in a yellow, disturbing patch. Widmar turned away quickly and went into the hall.

It smelt of damp and moth-balls in the hall. On the floor lay a picture from a fashion paper, showing a man in an evening jacket, with a stick in his hand. For all its banality, this man's face recalled surgeon Tamten's.

"Is anyone at home?" asked Widmar, putting his feet on the picture.

In the doorway appeared a little black creature,

smearred with soot. It was Angela. She was wearing a white muslin dress with red flowers; she held her cheeks in her dirty hands, thin as match-sticks. Her sparkling little Jewish eyes looked at Widmar with the concupiscence of a woman, almost.

"There's nobody at home," she answered.

Then, behind her shoulder appeared her nine-year-old brother's head, red as a carrot.

"Daddy's at home," he said sadly.

"Which one of you's lying?" cried Widmar, looking at them with disgust. And suddenly the apparition of the children seemed to him a frightful hallucination. "Such little monsters can be dreamed only in delirium!"

"Him!" cried Angela, indicating her brother.

Boruch bowed his red head and whispered in shame: "Yes, it's me."

"Where's your father?" asked Widmar.

"Daddy's dead!" cried Angela despairingly.

"Father's in the workroom," answered Boruch. He was an odd creature, this urchin. His wonderful, super-sensitive ear had caught a frankly tragic note in Widmar's voice. This terrible, bearded gentleman with flashing eyes and hooked nose seemed to him a prophet from the Bible. "This gentleman carries all stupid people with him!" he thought strangely.

"Dear sir," he said, copying his father, "if you're a prophet, why don't you strike people with thunderbolts?"

But then the workroom door opened, and tailor Gold came in with a pair of trousers in his hand. He stood still, looking at Widmar with the imploring gaze of a dog.

"Greetings, dear sir," he said pompously.

"You have a gifted son!" growled Widmar, forcing himself to lay his hand on the red, curly head. "He'll make a good engineer."

"Boruch," said the tailor sorrowfully, "what are seven times eight?"

"Fifty-one," replied Boruch. He was listening more and more attentively, and so he was a little absent-minded. Without any apparent reason, Widmar's voice reminded him of the lady at the window. His musical ear distinguished exactly the same notes. He was right. As often happens between married people, the vocal intonations of Widmar and Rebecca were almost identical. And nobody could tell which of them in this case was imitating the other. At last, Boruch slipped his head from under the weight of Widmar's hand.

"Every woman has weeds under her skirts!" he said incomprehensibly, and the tailor, in an ecstasy, threw the trousers from one hand to the other: "Dear, dear, dear!"

"I'd like to say a couple of words to you," said Widmar, who had heard nothing. He was living again in the narrow corridor of his personal griefs and trials. Apathetic and aching, he had only one aim: to see with his own eyes how "it's going on." The tailor bowed with a servile air and opened wide the workroom door.

"I'm just turning your trousers," he said with the pathetic expression of a mute. He had been engaged on this easy work for some days, dragging it out as if on purpose, for he had not the least predilection for the job. In any case, he knew for certain that his client had no need of these trousers.

They both vanished behind the door, and at once Angela glued her eye to the keyhole.

"The gentleman sat on the ironing-board! . . ." she squeaked.

The pot was bubbling on the stove again; on the table lay dirty plates with the remains of herrings. In

the porch the wind was banging a broken broom against the door.

Without even approaching the threshold and eaves-dropping, Boruch heard the man with the prophet's beard exclaim in the workroom: "Listen, Gold, with these dollars you could even go to America!"

"The gentleman's crying!" . . . lied Angela.

Behind the wall there was the sound of chairs being pushed back. Then Widmar's voice called: "I'll wait for you at seven o'clock. As soon as you've seen them, run to me at once!"

"I'll certainly be there at seven o'clock!" replied the tailor, and Boruch thought: "Daddy's lisping as sadly as if he were in the synagogue!"

He stood still in the middle of the room as Widmar, wiping his forehead with his handkerchief, passed by him.

That Friday, while the final events were unfolding, the gale was so strong that schools were shut and the children not allowed in the street. In the afternoon, a veritable cyclone struck the city and, uprooting pines and tearing roofs off houses, went whirling over it for several hours.

Surgeon Tamten, nevertheless, went to the café as usual. Breathless from his struggle with the wind, he rushed to the buffet; the head-waiter, Pierre, came to meet him, the surgeon dashed into the telephone box.

"Hello!" he cried into the receiver. Above the instrument there hung a notice: "Please do not telephone during the storm!" "Hello!" he cried. "Have inflammation of the brain symptoms begun in the patient who had the car accident?"

At the other end of the line the house-physician Boguski replied:

"Yes, superintendent. Paralysis of the right side"

"Apply dressings on the spot!" cried the surgeon and hung up the receiver. He did not even hear to the end Boguski's complaints against cars and the dangers of car riding. He knew by heart all the old man's anti-automobile laments. He was not impressed, either, by the worsening of the new patient's condition. It was a fatal day. The experience of many years had taught him that such days are inevitable in the practice of every surgeon. There was no remedy for it. So long as the ill luck did not extend to the whole of his private life. "Rebecca, Oh, Rebecca dear, I'm feeling blue when you're not near!" he hummed thoughtlessly, as he sipped his brandy. The shock he had experienced after the day's unhappy operation soon faded. He was not a youth starting out on his medical career, whose spirit might have been broken by such an accident. "It's not my fault!" he reiterated with an untroubled ruthlessness. But even if it had been his fault, he would not have been any more affected.

Some years before he had taken on his shoulders the responsibility—justifiably or no—for the life of others, and he had never faltered under the weight. Only from time to time that day, this memorable, tragic Friday, there rose before his eyes the image of patient three hundred and fourteen, dead under the knife on the operating-table. Then he would push this bloodstained shadow quickly from him, and sing: "Rebecca, Oh Rebecca dear! I'm feeling blue when you're not near!" All the while he was full of vague and sinister forebodings. This memorable Friday he was to have a rendezvous with the beloved woman for the last time. It was with this decision, at least, that he left the hospital. Otherwise, something extraordinary would happen this evening,

something that would blot out all past tortures. "Why can't she decide?" he wondered. For the first time in his life love became something more than a pastime in which he indulged during the hours he was free from duty and medical consultations. This pastime was beginning to cost him dearly. But for the absolute trust he had in his mistress, he could not have borne so long a period of uncertainty and a situation so ambiguous. But, sensual and sentimental, he attributed to his mistress the honest feelings and romantic traits of his own character. He was sure that every great emotion makes a man moral, and awakens the same qualities and the same virtues in those around him. "Love and goodness are one!" was his banal exclamation. "True love involves sincerity and reciprocal frankness. To be in love with someone means to present oneself to him in all one's honesty and moral worth!"

That was why, in this particular case, he was unacquainted, strictly speaking, with the emotion of jealousy, and regarded with scepticism, even, this "green-eyed monster." "To love each other means to be sure of each other. Wherever would there be room for suspicion, betrayal and jealousy!" Moreover, he believed in the parallelism of the experiences of love. He had often checked it. When he was longing for her, he knew with the utmost certainty that she was longing for him, too. Separated in different parts of the town, they thought of each other at one and the same moment of the day, in the same words, he had often checked it.

But today he felt exhausted. The heavy day of operations, shot through with continual misfortune, the sombre, vague forebodings, the feeling that he was near a catastrophe, that all the powers in heaven and earth were conjured up against him—gave him a depressed feeling. "It's not nice of her" he thought bitterly,

and in the bottom of his glass saw the dear, Byzantine face to whom he prayed through the brandy and all the operations. "It's not nice to keep on procrastinating. The sincerity of our feeling demands logical consequences!" That fatal Friday he was convinced that his entire philosophy of life would not hold water, or stand criticism from many points of view. He again recalled the woman with the pulmonary abscess who had died on the table, and digested the recollection with as much difficulty as if he were suffering from dysphagia. "I've been treating love too much like a quack," he thought, "it ought to have been put under the microscope at once."

Until then he had considered this universal emotion as a mild disturbance of the organism, let us say, as a light inflammation of the mucous membrane, a kind of erotic catarrh. But when he had become convinced that an acute state of catarrh may become a chronically serious state, he lost confidence in himself and could not regain it. His love outstripped his expectations. It was really a kind of "hyperamoris". He had not even suspected himself of being capable of such emotional hypertrophy.

At the start, he tried to call up his masculine cynicism to his aid, and to dismiss the whole thing as a bagatelle. He did not succeed in this at all, and surgeon Tamten found himself completely defenceless. It recalled the situation of a doctor who, somewhere in the country on leave, has to perform a sudden operation, but has no instruments to hand beyond a kitchen knife or perhaps a razor. He was learning that there existed a tragic and most rare love, which was taking possession of his whole life and even invading the domain of his professional duties. He would have liked to expel it, for he was accustomed to loneliness and could not imagine

that someone might share his intimacy forever. He felt now that something had broken and changed ; that now he would have to build everything anew.

It was a common enough case, "*casus vulgaris*", for ninety per cent. among men in this way abandon the proud isolation of their personality. The more lightly man treats human love, the more easily is he overthrown by it and even lost in it. To regard this excessively pathological affair lightly weakens the psychical resistance, which easily results in total amorous confusion.

Surgeon Tamten was already prepared for all these concessions to himself. That Friday he decided to do everything in his power to solve his situation. "Love is truth !" he thought with a gravity that did not square with his private life. He pressed the handle of the syphon, the soda water squirted on the tablecloth, the surgeon drained his glass at a gulp and went on musing. "If it is the truth, then we haven't the right to hold it in suspense ! It's possible that up to the present I've theoretically not known love, but the miracle has come to me in person !" He grimaced mechanically with his professional smile, for the word "miracle" does not exist in medicine. "This very day I'll have a decisive talk with her !" he declared, looking through the window.

The clouds were gliding over the house roofs, drowning the upper storeys in mist and smoke. "Awful, awful !" said someone passing the surgeon. The latter twisted round, and then saw Pierre the waiter leaning towards him.

"What's the matter ?" he asked. He hummed under his breath : "Rebecca, Rebecca, I'm feeling blue !"

The waiter's somnolent, swollen face was paler than usual. "The weather !" he replied, and the surgeon retorted indignantly :

"What weather, damnation! I don't understand!"

The café proprietor came out from behind the buffet counter, carrying in his hands a round object, glittering like glass. The proprietor shook the object with all his might and then looked at it in astonishment.

"A watch?" asked Tamten.

"A barometer," said the waiter, bowing.

In the jazz hall a copper cymbal was pealing like a gong, a saxophone moaned and the voluptuous sounds of a piano and a violin echoed on the air. A well-known negro song, its notes skipping in a pornographic tune, reached the terrace through the curtain, and danced above surgeon Tamten's shaggy head in a warning rhyme, "Rebecca, Rebecca! what's around the corner?"

The head waiter said something with an effort, trying to shout through the wind and the jazz-band, but in spite of it all the surgeon could hear was: "... they've gone mad! ..."

"Yes," he answered absent-mindedly, "Yes, the musicians have gone mad."

"No!" cried the head waiter amiably. "I'm not talking about the musicians, superintendent. I'm saying the barometers all over the town have gone mad!"

The door from the street was opened noisily, and a woman ran on to the terrace. Her hair was ruffled, her skirts bundled above her knees. "What's going to happen?" she cried. Suddenly, one of the trees growing by the pavement under the terrace windows swayed, and with a dry crack fell on to the pathway. Next moment a gust of wind lifted it and hurled it with its branches against the windows of the house opposite. The surgeon saw a glittering rain of glass fall from the windows, but borne by the wind it disappeared at once over the heads of fleeing pedestrians.

"Hold on to the child!" yelled the surgeon. Through the window he saw a little girl come prancing out of a shop, just by the fallen tree. Everybody in the café stood up from the tables, in the dance-hall the jazz-band blared without stopping. Surgeon Tamten, with his professional smile, elbowed the gazers aside, and made his way quickly between the tables; he wanted to go out into the street, but Pierre the head-waiter held him back.

"Everything's ended all right, doctor."

"Aha!" said Tamten, and went back to drink his brandy.

The child was lying on the pavement, not even scared. With a smile it got up on all fours and crawled into the shop. It was six o'clock. Surgeon Tamten stood up, and paying no heed to the tempest, ran out of the café.

It was cloudy. The candles were lit in tailor Gold's lodgings. His children, Angela and Boruch, were playing at hide-and-seek. The tailor sat in the yard, sheltering from the wind behind a corner of the house.

Electric light sparkled on the café terrace just at the stroke of six, that is to say immediately after surgeon Tamten's departure. And just at the stroke of six, the rain began to fall.

It was something unknown in this locality, a simply tropical downpour. The inky black sky seemed to have opened and torrents of yellowish-green water fell down. In a second the streets were covered in foaming waves. The waves, roaring, fled along the pavements and foot-paths, and tailor Gold, soaked to the skin, ran into the hall. The surgeon, however, had a waterproof. Wrapped in his raincoat, alert and determined, muttering almost gaily, he jumped over the puddles and rushing floods.

The clouds banked up again, and it was dark as night. At the corner only, an electric lamp burned with a greenish light. Surgeon Tamten glanced quickly behind him, bounded on the grey stone steps and vanished behind the door of the neighbouring house.

And then, just afterwards, the rain stopped. The tailor, who was keeping a careful look-out on the window of the house opposite, observed that the lamp was lit in the room. He made out surgeon Tamten's alert shadow clinging to the window-pane, and then saw the yellow curtain fall. Then the tailor went into the street again.

Almost simultaneously, the reverberation of hooves and wheels was heard through the vapours hissing along the street. Struggling hard against the gale, a cab with its hood up arrived at the neighbouring house. The tailor pressed himself against the fence, and, slipping sideways, took a few steps.

"Dear, dear, dear!" he sighed. "I must make sure in such weather!"

Rebecca Widmar jumped out of the cab and disappeared at a run into the hall, then she turned and went up the stairs. She stopped, looked at the barrel of lime and seemed to sniff something. She was struck by a strange odour of putrefaction. This odour reminded her of something, but she could not pin it down. She disappeared in the gloom and the tailor heard the door shut behind her.

"Still, I must find out whether it's really her," decided tailor Gold who, since the previous evening, had become extraordinarily bold In any case, he had nothing to lose. If he was afraid, it was of one thing only—Widmar's fury. The grief and passion by which this man was carried away reduced the tailor to a state

of inertia. He went back into his yard again, and never taking his eye off the window, climbed up on to the fence. The alley was so narrow that he could touch the window-sill with his hand.

"Perhaps this weather's a good thing," thought the tailor, "there's not even a dog in the street" . . . He sat on the fence and stretched out his hand.

At once he came out in a cold sweat of terror and started trembling. He overcame his terror, however, and once more touched the wet pane. He was sure the window was not shut, so he took hold of one casement and opened it noiselessly. Then, from behind the other casement, he heard every word of the following conversation.

"Why didn't you come yesterday?" asked the surgeon reproachfully.

"Dear, don't be angry with me. I was longing for you so terribly," replied a woman's voice. "I couldn't leave the house yesterday, my husband spent the whole evening with me."

There was silence and then the light sound of a kiss.

"Your husband was at home?" asked Tamten, and Rebecca probably heard something disturbing in the question.

"Yes," she said quickly. "Why do you ask?"

There was another silence, and then the surgeon's alert shadow went from one corner of the room to the other.

"It seemed to me yesterday that he was here."

"Impossible."

The woman's voice seemed to come from the place where the bed ought to be.

"I waited for you," said the surgeon, "and I just didn't know what to do with myself."

"Darling!" interrupted the woman's voice with an indescribable and melancholy cajolery.

"Yes, yes," continued the surgeon, "you've been torturing me dreadfully these last few days, Rebecca I was waiting and thinking about you, that I couldn't go on any longer and that it would have to be ended. Then there was a knock at the door, I shouted: 'Come in!' the door opened and I even saw a hand holding the handle. But the next moment the door shut in front of my very nose, and when I ran out to the stairs there was nobody there. Perhaps I dreamed it all. For some days I've had nothing but unpleasantness and strange things keep happening to me. I'm carrying a revolver and soon, through nervous excitement, I shall shoot some innocent man who happens to cross my path"

"You'll shoot?" asked Rebecca curiously.

"Yesterday I was within a hair's breadth of shooting through the window," said the surgeon and his shadow again went gliding across the room. "Without rhyme or reason, it seemed to me someone was walking out there. It was quite stupid and I'm ashamed of it now. But yesterday I couldn't manage to control myself, I opened the window and leaned out, revolver in hand. Of course, nobody was there. I even laughed at my own stupidity. It was so furiously dark and such a furious gale was raging that I doubt whether anybody stirred from their homes except us"

Rebecca's quiet laugh was heard.

"We're silly, like all clever people who love," she answered.

This time her predilection for the paradox did not repel surgeon Tamten. He was clearly absorbed in something else.

"This stress and strain," he said, "throws me off

my balance. It can't go on like this any longer. Why have you no consideration for me ? ”

“ You're saying that to me ? ” replied Rebecca sadly and somewhat disappointed. “ You know perfectly well what I've done for you.”

“ It's not enough,” retorted the surgeon. His shadow disappeared and his voice, too, now came from the direction of the bed. That is how it was in reality, for he sat beside Rebecca and with an absent-minded movement smoothed the folds of the yellow satin quilt. As well as the bed the room contained a table, a cupboard, some chairs and a big leather settee under the window. The place had the unlivid-in, uncomfortable air of an hotel room.

“ It's not enough ! ” reiterated surgeon Tamten. “ Our love demands decisive steps. I've always told you, it's obvious that I don't want anything to do with a passing romance.”

“ What do you want ? ” asked Rebecca. She moved her hand slowly over the quilt until at last it met the surgeon's palm.

“ Everything,” he answered brusquely, but the brusqueness fled at the unexpected contact and word : “ everything ” vibrated like an erotic allusion.

“ But you have everything,” she said with a smile. She leant towards him and kissed him on the lips.

He lost his breath. He was stifled and his presence of mind abandoned him, as if a chloroformed mask had been thrown on his face. “ A-A-Ah ! ” he sighed dully, and in a movement to which both were accustomed threw back her shoulders.

She slipped out of his hands, however. At that he came to himself at once and gazed at her attentively.

"What's the matter? Are you frightened?" he asked. She had a strange and unfamiliar look on her face.

"No," she answered, "only something's upsetting me in an odd way today."

He did not insist. Firstly because, in accordance with the law of the parallelism of amorous feelings, he experienced a physical coldness, evidently the echo of her own. Secondly, he was too well acquainted with women not to reckon with all the changes of their sexual dispositions.

"A woman has a sounder instinct and she must be obeyed!" he thought, observing her attentively, Suddenly she asked:

"Are you sure you shut the door?"

He stood up, and though he knew he had locked the door after her arrival, he went over to make sure and calm her. He went back to his place and reiterated:

"You're frightened!"

"I'm not frightened of anything," she answered unconvincingly. Then she began to smile and smiles went running over her face, one after the other. It was a picture provoking bashfulness, taking away all strength and power of movement, it was a picture that always plunged the surgeon into sensual despair. These rippling smiles produced on him the effect of an uninterrupted rain of caresses; his excitement increased to such a hopeless degree that whatever could happen in their love—the best, the most complete, the deepest—nothing could have satisfied or appeased him. The most sanguinary avidity, the rapacity, the exclusiveness of eroticism awoke in his body. He felt a grief and longing all the more intense as he lacked the strength to allay them. Had he been able, he would have swallowed his

mistress, along with her hands, her feet, her belly, like a narcotic poison and medicine.

It took a great effort to retain his common-sense in spite of everything, and to reply :

“ Yes, you’re sometimes very brave, I even wonder at your courage ”

He knew this was not what he wanted to say, nor in the tone that was appropriate. So he forced himself to change the tone :

“ You’re sometimes a coward ! ” he ejaculated.

With infinite gentleness and sweetness she asked him to explain in what circumstances this had been so, and then asked coquettishly :

“ I’m a coward perhaps when I risk having a child by you ? ”

And in that instant something happened, something that nothing could put right any more. Rebecca evidently found her bearings too late, she bit her lips and in her enormous dark eyes gleamed a little cold and watchful light. Quickly, she threw an almost imperceptible glance at the surgeon. But surgeon Tamten was sitting beside her in harmless amazement. He shook his head. Mistakenly, that reassured her.

“ But you can’t have children,” replied the surgeon with a sincere and melancholy amazement. “ During the operation the second ovary and the adherents ” he broke off.

He had the air of a man who is stupified at the sight of an unbelievable happening, and one in the highest degree enigmatic. He shook his head, however. Rebecca gazed at his handsome, black hair. The surgeon said tenderly: “ I’m sorry to remind you about it ! ” and Rebecca began to cry. She threw her head back, and

little, violet tears flowed down, first on her temples, then along her ears, they ran along the bones of the jaw and fell on her neck and shoulders. Her face was immobile and only her lower lip trembled slightly. Her mouth looked swollen, it lost its clear outlines, and seemed to spread touchingly in a vague red stain.

Generally, women's tears did not weaken the surgeon. On the contrary, they stirred within him the desire to protest : it was an irrefutable proof of the goodness and tenderness of his character. He was afraid of his own sentimentality, for he knew it would cause his inevitable ruin, his losing of himself in another, and such a loss was equivalent to a moral death.

" You're a coward because, to this day, you've not been able to solve our situation," said the surgeon, trying not to see her tears, which at that same moment suddenly stopped falling. Two or three still ran down from the outer corners of her eyes, but they did so mechanically, as it were. They fell, avoiding the lashes so delicately, that not a trace of streaked mascara was left on her cheeks.

" But, dear, I do everything you want, everything you tell me, don't I ? " said Rebecca sweetly.

" I want you to tell your husband everything at last, or allow me to talk to him ! " cried the surgeon, and with an angular movement of protest he shifted to the end of the bed. This movement evidently amused Rebecca a little, for an indulgent, understanding smile ran across her face.

" But I did so long ago," she answered frankly. Then she heaved a troubled sigh, with a little movement as if to say: " How stupid and impossible you are, but what a darling ! "

" You put it off too long ! " replied the surgeon. " I

know your husband suspects me ; a blind man would understand everything, of course, but I've pledged you my word and I can't tell him anything. You must realise that such a situation is inexpressibly unpleasant to me. I don't want to hide from him any longer, and I consider it's not worthy of us. And I'm quite sure you've not had any discussion with him ?"

" I discussed it with him no later than yesterday ; that was why, unfortunately, I couldn't come here," she replied in a hurt tone.

It upset the surgeon, so he touched her shoulder and apologised.

" I'm reproaching you only because I love you so much. But what did you talk to him about ? "

" About you, though I didn't mention your name once," she said bitterly, and it seemed to the surgeon that he was acting towards her like an utter scoundrel.

" Rebecca ! " he whispered, tenderly. But now it was she who moved away from his hand and said in a sad, still offended voice :

" In spite of that, your name hung above our conversation the whole time, just as it hangs above my whole life."

Musing, she fell silent.

" My husband didn't leave the house the whole of the afternoon," she said after a while. " He was sitting in his study, leaning his head on his hands, and doing nothing. It worried me so, you've no idea. I knew he was suffering and that he was very sad. I asked him in a friendly way what was the matter with him ? He answered that his heart was aching. I talked with him then, all the evening. He must be prepared for our separation, mustn't he ? You're kind and so you understand it."

"I don't know whether it's kindness to keep someone in continual suspense," said the surgeon.

"Suspense?" repeated Rebecca. "But haven't I done what you asked, and didn't I tell my husband at once that I was in love with somebody else and that I can't live with him like that any more now?"

"That's so natural, there's no merit to you in it," replied the surgeon.

In this affair there were not two points of view for him. He believed that the emotion linking him with Rebecca entailed the immediate and direct solution of all vital questions. Furthermore, it was physically impossible for him to conceive the possibility of a double life. He also knew that for the woman in love every contact with a strange man is distasteful, and he regarded that as the best natural weapon against betrayal. What, then, was extraordinary in that Rebecca should respect their pact of love? What, then, could be more natural than that from the time they had become lovers she had ceased to live with her husband? He only pitied her for not yet having dared to let her husband know in a decided way that she was leaving him for ever "I must force her to it," he decided.

"You've stopped living with your husband" he began.

"Do you know how hard that's been?" she interrupted bitterly.

It was evident she was suffering and that she felt she was not understood.

"It's disagreeable for me to speak about it but you don't know what my husband's like. For him the physical life together is everything."

The surgeon was silent. He gazed at the curtain, but with such an absent look that he did not even remark

how it puffed up in the wind. On the table a little electric lamp was burning which, from under the shade, lit only the floor and a part of the bed. The ceiling and the rest of the room were in shadow.

"It's not nice to tell you this," Rebecca's low voice vibrated, "but you must know, for example, that my husband didn't respect me as a woman even just after the operation, when it was forbidden me."

The surgeon did not even stir, although he had an immeasurable compassion for this poor, beloved woman whom someone had dared maltreat. The sadness that overwhelmed him surpassed even the tormenting knowledge that the beloved woman had belonged to someone else once "The past doesn't exist," he thought. "From the time that she's mine, nothing bad will be able to happen!"

"After the operation, I was forbidden to live with him for six weeks," she said in embarrassment.

"Six weeks," he repeated sombrely.

"In spite of that, my husband came back much too soon, almost immediately after the operation. It was so horrible, not being able to drive him away from me at night!"

Her dark, olive-skinned face grew even darker. She drew her brows together and stared fixedly with an oblique, slightly squinting look.

"What a muddle!" she sighed.

"Of course," said Tamten joyfully, "but now it's easy for you to finish with it!"

"You're wrong," she said, and now a kind of compassion sounded in her voice. The surgeon was so understanding, however, that he managed to utter delicately: "Perhaps it's better not to speak about it?" but Rebecca went on:

"That's exactly why, because he's so dependent on me physically, that it was so difficult for me to tell him everything!" she cried. "But I did tell him, though, that I love someone else, that I wouldn't leave him for the time being since we formed, say, a kind of life association for business . . . for friendship . . . but that I can't live with him, at least not now. Perhaps everything would pass, and then, I said, I'd go back to him again. Believe me, I couldn't arrange the matter any other way."

"Of course," said the surgeon.

"You understand that yourself," Rebecca ended hurriedly. "I know I cause him great pain. He takes it to heart so, that I was afraid for his life, even. He was only kept going by a childish trust in me, and in the fact that I'd never leave him. He's shut up in himself and waiting patiently for everything to settle itself and for me to go back to him."

She lifted her hand sorrowfully, and at the same time smiled kindly.

"Yet I know very well it's no longer possible! . . ." she ended firmly.

Her hand was still in the air, the surgeon caught it in both his and kissed it, while Rebecca looked lovingly at his shaggy, bowed head.

"My darling!" she whispered.

They both knew perfectly what must follow next moment, and this certainty awoke the same excitement in them both. The surgeon stooped over her, Rebecca suddenly curved herself as if her backbone had been removed, the surgeon put his arms round this yielding, melting body, when the curtain at the window billowed up again. "This is really the greatest truth!" thought the surgeon, dazzled by the illusory depth of his sensual

excitement. Simultaneously, he felt the inert body he embraced became harder and then even unyielding. He took his arms from her and stood up reassured. "Yet she is frightened of something," he affirmed.

"What's the matter with you?" he asked.

"I've told you already that something's upsetting me today," she excused herself tenderly. Then she pressed herself against the surgeon's shoulder and said in a breath: "Is it really true that we're meeting in this room for the last time? I don't know why, but I've no confidence in it any more. Rent a room somewhere else, won't you?"

"But of course," he said reassuringly.

"And yet," she interrupted and looked round with a saddened, melancholy gaze, "and yet I've grown so used to it! . . . Just think, it's as inhospitable as a hotel room, repellent, no other woman could love here, that's certain. But I've grown so fond of it, simply because I've been here with you . . ."

For a second her eyes stopped on the billowing curtain. "Why don't you shut the window?" she asked. The surgeon replied: "It's shut," and forced himself to pursue the conversation whose main theme continually evaded him.

"I don't want to go on any longer!" he declared forcibly, and added: "There exists, God knows, a corporal morality like any other . . . And it's untrue that the soul can remain innocent in a dishonoured body . . . That never happens."

"I don't understand what it's all about," she answered, "Indeed, you know how I'll do everything you tell me to. I've no will of my own any more . . . So tell me what you want and I'll do everything . . ."

The lack of any resistance on her part shook the surgeon's self-confidence, and the value of his previous demands was reduced to the caprice of an impatient lover. He said uncertainly :

" Today you must confess everything to your husband and break with him."

" But, my dear," she said in astonishment, " that's simply impossible."

Out of the corner of her eye she saw surgeon Tamten's almost brutal gesture, and said maternally: " Darling, why do you torment me so? You know perfectly well it will be as you yourself desire."

He dealt the quilt a blow of the fist that made the springs of the mattress creak. He wanted to say something very sharp, but contained himself as he was intrigued by another very obscure matter.

" Just why do you procrastinate so? " he asked.

" I want to make easier for my husband the shock he's expecting," she answered with dignity.

" I wasn't mistaken when I thought love and morality are one," he whispered. He did not see Rebecca's watchful glance. She was looking at him with maternal solicitude.

" My little one, my child . . ." she repeated.

Evidently night had fallen behind the window, for the shadows in the room, on the walls and on the ceiling grew more and more dark and clear. The lamp screened with its orange shade threw a narrow circle of light round it, lighting only Rebecca's feet and those of surgeon Tamten, while their two heads were drowned in a reddish haze. Rebecca's loveliness gained considerably from it. Her face looked as if carved in some rosy stone, not a single wrinkle could be seen. The surgeon gazed at her, melting, while the rest of his common sense left him.

He knew he could do whatever he liked with this woman, and this intimidated him and deprived him of self-confidence in his actions, for there is nothing so weakening as the feeling of boundless power.

Feeling that all his demands were unjust, and, a more serious matter, useless, surgeon Tamten abandoned nearly all his claims. To have a final certitude, he put the traditional question : " And you'll really never leave me ? " and when he heard the calm and assured, " Yes," he felt for the first time in his life the weight of his future.

Before his eyes rose the operating-theatre, on the table lay the corpses of butchered creatures. For the first time in his life, he exaggerated the importance of his tragic profession to the dimensions almost of a catastrophe, while at the same time he was astonished that, up to this day, he had been able to support the burden without the least help. Now when help had suddenly come in the shape of the dearest woman, dark and disturbing, he felt himself small, weak and deprived of all the strength necessary for continuing the struggle. He looked at the rounded shoulder, hidden in gleaming, dark silk, and he had only one desire : to lie on this shoulder and remain there in a state of utter forgetfulness.

" Rebecca ! " he said with his lips only, and grasped her in his arms like a pile of immaculate hygroscopic gauze, like the seriously ailing body of the most precious being, whom he had to save with his surgical knife.

It was the wisest therapeutic and the only one against that sickness which is called : love. Again, in that gesture they both knew by heart, he bent her backwards, sought her inordinately full lips with his mouth, clung to them, as to a glass of some marvellous medicine, and drank her bitter, thick saliva. A moment after, their heads were buried in the pillows, and the circle of light

fell on their knees and feet no more, simply because there were no longer any feet within the ray of this circle, but only the edge of the bed and a corner of the hanging quilt.

As the springs grated, a door banged down below, opened by the wind, while the curtain billowed still more at the window. But neither surgeon Tamten nor Rebecca heard or saw anything.

Besides, it would never have entered their heads that someone might be eavesdropping and looking at them. The wildest conjectures would not have suggested the picture of tailor Gold, sitting on the fence and throwing his imploring dog's look at the curtain that billowed up before him to such an extent that it uncovered the whole room. Then he saw the lamp, burning on the table, and a wash-basin of glittering white faience. On the left side he saw the bed.

With that, the tailor jumped down off the fence, trying to do so with the least possible noise. He hung by his hands on a plank, and then, with the whole weight of his body, let himself fall on the soft, drenched ground. It was dark and close. The tailor clutched his head, and ran out of the yard, panting and groaning. In passing, he noticed the light, burning in his house, and the children busy round the table. "I'll come back to them straight away!" thought the tailor blissfully, while he struggled desperately with the gale which seemed to push him back towards his home. His cheap felt hat flew off his head every moment, the tails of his jacket flapped, his trousers wrapped round his legs. It was the more unpleasant because the tailor's clothes, previously sodden with rain, clung to his body like a cold compress. He was shuddering with cold, trembling all over, and nothing

could stop his nervous shaking. His every step was a fight with the unleashed elements, but yet he struggled forward, thinking with terror that it must certainly be seven o'clock now and that Widmar was waiting for him.

Surgeon Tamten, at a certain most ill-chosen moment, and having nothing decisive about it in any case, felt suddenly sobered and was able to glance down with a look already quite self-possessed. He saw a face indifferent to love, with a strained, concentrated expression. This expression froze his sexual ardour! The surgeon stood up and asked :

" You're quite different from usual, what's the matter with you ? "

" I don't know," she answered.

Behind this answer was hidden a whole unknown, strange and feminine world. Surgeon Tamten felt that it was not she, but rather he who did not know, and that he stood in front of a wall, in front of a secret process, for which he could not establish an immediate diagnosis. He realised only that just now he must be tender, understanding and kind, so he said :

" I understand your state. But I pledge you that I shall be able to defend you from every danger."

At the same time he noticed that little violet tears had again begun running down Rebecca's temples. Accustomed in general to women's tears, he was surprised in this case.

Usually, women's tears are connected with some clearly defined aim, they are to a certain extent utilitarian, but Rebecca's tears appeared to be entirely objectless and purposeless. So, in as much as the surgeon had previously put up with the weeping unwillingly, with suspicion and scepticism, the more now did he attach importance and respect to it.

He bent over her temples, and began to kiss away the salt, incomprehensible drops.

Rebecca's arms were lying motionless along the quilt, but then she lifted one of them and clasped the surgeon's neck. She made the gesture automatically, however, as if out of duty. "Darling!" the surgeon heard the whisper, and with still greater tenderness his lips clung to the damp, tear-wet skin. As through a haze he saw her wide-open eyes fixed on the ceiling. Suddenly he felt a shock and the arm clasping his neck freed him, and even pushed him away forcibly.

"My God! There's someone coming up the stairs!" hissed Rebecca, and with a quick movement put her dress down on her knees. The surgeon turned his head towards the door and listened. But nothing was heard except the wind.

"You only dreamed it!" he said in a calm, cool tone, as when, during an operation, he had to master the nervous excitement of his exhausted assistants. Yet deep within, he too shared Rebecca's disquietude. From his experience of love he knew that every woman meeting a man in a hotel or bachelor-flat experiences from time to time an indefinable panic, wholly instinctive and animal, depriving her of her peace of mind and of all desire for caresses. He also knew a strange thing, but statistically verifiable, that such panic precedes some actual danger.

"There's certainly someone walking there!" brought out Rebecca, and her whole body began to tremble.

"Don't be frightened; even if someone were coming we can face it," replied the surgeon.

"All the same, see there's nobody there!" she said peremptorily, and for the first time the surgeon heard in her voice a sharp, egoistic undertone. She spoke as if

her lover's presence no longer mattered to her. The surgeon felt a little hurt, but he treated it as an unhealthy over-sensitiveness. From the pocket of his raincoat hanging on a hook by the cupboard, he took a torch, and went to the door.

He turned the key and very slowly and cautiously set the door ajar. Simultaneously, he directed the dazzling ray of the torch into the black crack. He was at once convinced there was nobody behind the door. Then he opened the door wide and looked out on to the stairs. It was dark in the well of the staircase. The narrow ray of light pierced the darkness, while the black, clear shadow of the balustrade fell on the stairs. Down below the wind howled. The surgeon moved his torch about in the air, lighting up each corner in turn, then he went back into the room and shut the door.

"There's nobody," he said cheerfully, "you're in the same state of mind I was in yesterday. And that's because we're stealing love, instead of confessing it honestly."

"You see, it's because I'm so nervous and upset at something that it's hard for me to give myself to you just now without worrying," said Rebecca, and now she seemed to the surgeon once more near and kind as he knew her. "You see," she continued, "I myself don't know what I'm frightened of, but it prevents me from enjoying my happiness."

"Of course," he replied. "I can feel it and that's why I too, haven't been happy today," and profiting from the fact that his head was clear and not be-fogged with desire, he sat down on the bed beside Rebecca and began :

"Listen, have you ever had the same emotion before as we're feeling now ? "

"What a hackneyed question!" he thought with his remaining critical sense. He was once more aware that the more tender he grew, the more foolish he became. What's to be done when, in sincere love, a man loses all originality first and foremost? The greater his love, the more banal are its manifestations. "I won't be ashamed of it," he thought, and went on:

"I should never have imagined that such a thing was possible I mean, that one can love like this"

She nodded her head. "It's the same with me."

"Even then?" asked the surgeon.

She smiled sadly and kindly;

"How can you compare?"

"Why didn't you wait for me?" he sighed.

The memory of Rebecca's past now caused him only a serene suffering. From her own accounts he knew all her life.

He knew she had married very late, not so much for love as from the conviction that she was indispensable to the existence of Widmar, who had loved her many long months before he had at last succeeded in conquering her by the strength of his emotions and obstinacy.

At the outset, it seemed to her that she was in love with him, but then, unfortunately, she had become convinced that her love was only the reflection of his, and almost immediately after their marriage, her relations with her husband became simply friendly. "He's terribly attached to me!" she would reiterate, "and I am to him too, you understand." From her accounts, which she gave readily and gaily enough, but which were at the same time full of a veritable virginal bashfulness, from her accounts Tamten knew that, before her marriage, she had been engaged to some officer with whom she

had lived a few years, but who had finally left her. She was not afraid of living with him, for if she loved she was able to look men in the eyes with an untroubled brow "But this time, too, I didn't love!" she confided to surgeon Tamten. Neither did she love when, for the first and only time, she betrayed her husband.

This confession was exceptionally painful to her. It appeared from her account that a year ago, during her husband's absence, she had chanced to meet a friend of her former fiancé, and had yielded to him quite unexpectedly. It was in the forest where she had gone for a walk with him. Of course, she did not deny he pleased her, but only physically. It was simply carnal possession. The young and vigorous lancer attracted her, in addition to his vigour, by his singular beauty, with something feminine in it, and because of some strange horsey smell. But she never imagined this would happen in the end. When they went to the wood she was as far as possible from the idea. She remembered only that the lancer, who walked behind her, at one moment looked at her neck, and this look provoked a sensation of intolerable heat throughout her body. Then this feeling vanished and only curiosity remained. They were not out walking longer than twenty minutes. It happened so quickly it left no impression. She parted from him at once and never wanted to see him again. "He doesn't even know I had an operation afterwards"

As for the operation, she always referred to it as a just punishment. "On the other hand, it was my greatest happiness, wasn't it!" she said with the smile of a child: "for without the operation, I might not have met you, perhaps!"

"I lived through some terrible things then. If you hadn't been so kind to me that time I was in the hospital,

I would certainly have done something bad to myself. I felt so disgusted with myself. I had to hide everything from my husband, though I don't know how he'd take it. You know, it's my impression that he can't have children, although he desires it so much. And now I can't tell him it's my fault, and that now I can never be a mother ! For a long time after that I received letters from the lancer, he sent me flowers and always wanted to meet me, and, I felt it, was very surprised that nothing ever happened between us again."

Now when the surgeon remembered her confidences, he grew unspeakably sad.

"Why didn't you wait for me?" he asked tenderly.

"How was I to know I'd meet you, that such extraordinary happiness existed?" she whispered.

"My poor, poor darling !" sighed the surgeon. He belonged to the type of men who, when they love, must feel pity and compassion. But then he shook his head decidedly and took Rebecca's hand.

"And how was it with your three other lovers?" he asked jokingly in a foolish tone.

He wanted to joke, to say something amusing, at all costs to soothe Rebecca and bring back his and her carefree mood. "Never in my life was I worried longer than five minutes!" he muttered gaily, and he was even irritated with himself for having dabbled so long in gloomy and intangible matters. He wanted to say something witty, so as to begin laughing next moment and, at least, to forget everything for the time being again. But since nothing witty came into his head, he uttered the first phrase that occurred to him. The remark, however, turned out to be a sorry, and what was more, a tactless joke.

"And how was it with your three other lovers?" he asked foolishly, and waited for the moment when Rebecca would burst out laughing. Rebecca did not burst out laughing, however.

Then he raised his eyes to her and noticed, without understanding anything, that the expression on her face had become cold and repellent. She sat up on the bed and asked defiantly:

"Who told you that?"

His first reaction was to confess his stupid joke. But not knowing why himself, he decided to continue the joke. "Why doesn't she even smile? Does she want to see nothing but sad things everywhere today?" he thought and went on joking:

"One of my friends," he said thoughtlessly, and was almost delighted with his naïve mystifying.

"Which one?" she asked quickly.

"I can't tell you that," he said, amused, "but now I know everything about you."

"It's not true!" she said sharply.

Rebecca's behaviour was utterly incomprehensible. Instead of bursting into laughter and smiling, instead of stroking his head, "Why are you making fun of me, darling!" she sat unmoving, and was thinking with obvious tension, as if she were trying to recall something.

"I know who could have told you!" she said at last.

"Ah, if you know, all the better Why didn't you ever tell me about it yourself?" and he winked his golden eyes. He was still waiting for her to smile. But she did not smile. On the contrary, she became still more shut up in herself, watchful and even hostile.

"I didn't speak to you about it because you never asked me," she retorted.

Only then did he remark that she was dreadfully confused, embarrassed, and that she had utterly lost control of herself. He opened his mouth and sat down in the utmost stupefaction. And when next moment he understood everything, he grew terribly cold and felt the goose-flesh rise.

"A trifle, a trifle!" said the surgeon drily.

It was in reality more than a trifle; it was a foolishness, but a foolishness perpetrated by Rebecca. When she had grasped it, there was no remedy by then, since Tamten had grasped it too. Rebecca smiled, but with a troubled smile; the surgeon repeated in his official, hospital voice: "A trifle, a trifle!"

"Darling, you haven't understood me properly," said Rebecca hurriedly. To her consternation and still greater anxiety, the surgeon showed his teeth in an automatic, soulless smile.

"Now tell me everything," he said.

"I've nothing to tell," she retorted.

She fell silent. It was obvious she was on her guard, and was attentively following every expression on his face and every movement.

"I'm not concerned with them," said Tamten coldly. "You may even have had a thousand of them! But why did you lie?"

"But, my darling, of course I never lied to you about anything," and Rebecca wrung her hands.

"You did lie," repeated surgeon Tamten, and Rebecca remembered he had worn the same expression when he was washing his hands before the operation.

"No!" and then she began, crying and swallowing her words in her hurry: "You didn't ask me, did you

... Of course I always told you everything . . . the whole truth . . . What do you want from me . . . ? ”

“ The truth,” he replied.

She stared at him for a while; she was evidently trying to collect her thoughts.

“ I don’t know why you’re tormenting me,” she said, hostile.

“ God forbid ! ” he protested, and reiterated, “ Now tell me how it was.”

At last she made up her mind.

“ I didn’t want to upset you. Believe me, I’d have told you a little later on, but I would have told you for certain.”

“ In reality,” thought Tamten : “ it’s so simply explained ! ” He lost his grip and had not the slightest idea what to reply.

She grasped his indecision in a flash, and again—one could not count the number of times that evening—she began to cry. It was like a final argument she wanted to use. Unfortunately, this time her weeping was rewarded with a different success from the one she hoped for. Since in this case the tears had a definite aim, their usefulness could be felt, if the expression may be used, and they produced their usual effect on the surgeon, awaking in him frank aversion and a still greater distrust. With a professional, automatic gesture he rubbed his hands, it looked as if he were cold and at the same time as if he were scrubbing his hands with a brush over the basin in the dressing room.

Since surgeon Tamten’s head was swarming with doubts, and since he was now able to look at the woman sitting beside him from a new point of view, a whole series of facts presented themselves before him in another

light. It suffices to have a theory that somehow holds water, some coherent opinion about things, and to want to believe in it, for all the facts to arrange themselves in a chain of proofs, apparently quite irrefutable. But it is enough to alter the viewpoint for these facts to testify to something quite diametrically opposed. And here surgeon Tamten suddenly recalled Rebecca's strange and seemingly senseless phrase at the start of their conversation. "I'm a coward perhaps when I risk having a child by you?" she had asked, and at that moment, the question had seemed to him strangely mysterious. Only now did he understand its true significance.

"Listen," he said: "why did you say a little while ago that you weren't frightened of having a child by me?"

She shrugged her shoulders and stopped crying.

"I don't remember," she said frankly.

He looked into her eyes, but nothing, absolutely nothing, could be read in her eyes.

"You've certainly said it to every other man to prove your love" he said. He was prepared for another denial and another lie, but Rebecca's unexpected reply disconcerted him, and made him lose his balance,

"Yes! I said it!" she said defiantly, and even aggressively.

"A trifle, a trifle," said surgeon Tamten, showing his teeth in an artificial smile.

There was an instant when he felt nothing, knew nothing, as if he were experiencing a state of total anæsthesia. The shock was too great for him to have the strength to react against it. In spite of that, he stood up quickly, he even started up from the bed and, without knowing why, ran to the window. He probably did not notice either the billowing curtain, or that the

window was open. He shut it automatically, and stood motionless a few moments, staring at the yellow stuff of the curtain, and when at last he turned round, he saw with an indescribable embarrassment that Rebecca was standing in the middle of the room, taking off her clothes.

"How abominable!" he thought, but in the same moment, "My God, how lovely!"

With an amazing rapidity, she threw off her dress, then with a clicking she undid her rubber belt, and then under her orange silk chemise could be sensed the extraordinary and thrice accursed line of her belly.

"What are you doing?" cried the surgeon, running towards her. Shreds of thoughts went slipping through his head. "But after all that, it's impossible!" he repeated.

But, unfortunately, it was perfectly possible. She pressed herself against him, he felt her warm body, "Oh, how unhappy!" he thought with an absurd, amorous compassion; he felt her desperate, feverish movements, he grasped that she was holding on to him just then as her last plank of safety. A sense of animal tragedy seized him at once, he felt a penetrating grief, accompanying the greatest sensual delight. Bewildered, the surgeon whispered: "Rebecca!" but a mask of feminine chloroform was applied to his face and golden stars sparkled before his eyes. It was dreadfully uncomfortable, the pillows stifled him, it seemed that the whole bed was littered with annoying cushions, and so next moment, the pillows were already lying on the floor. Nothing was enough. There was no way of either drinking or swallowing or imbibing this dearest, detested body, it was impossible to hold back this love emanating from the tenderest shoulders, the tenderest caresses.

Somewhere from far away he heard Rebecca's altered, shaking cry: "You love me! You really do love me!" It was a cry that filled him with terror, and with still greater desire and longing. The cry penetrated his whole body, like a torrent of intense white fire.

"You really do love me, I know it, I feel it!" she cried aloud.

He sought for her lips and swallowed her cry, along with an enormous tongue that filled his whole mouth. In that very moment, he experienced an instant of relaxation and satiety, but in that very moment, he discovered that "something's not right."

Yes. It could not be defined in any other words. "Something's not right," he thought. Yet he was sleepy and languid to such a degree that it was beyond him even to feel surprised. In all, he was not sober enough to guess what had happened.

The whole matter was simply this, that when he opened his eyes and looked in front of him at Rebecca's face in a given moment, he could see absolutely nothing but black emptiness. He felt a warm, slightly bitter breath on his cheeks and nostrils, a woman's hair brushed his cheeks, but yet he could not see anything beyond impenetrable night. "Something's not right!" he thought lazily, but next moment he came to himself, raised himself alertly on the mattress and looked round. It was dark in the room.

"Was it you who put out the light?" he asked. He stretched out his arm and met a slightly damp, naked body. Rebecca was sitting beside him.

"Nothing of the kind," she replied in an alarmed and astonished whisper.

Then the surgeon jumped out of bed and once more met a naked shoulder. He even felt how the shoulder was trembling with a tiny, continuous shiver.

"The bulb's gone for sure," he said comfortingly, "or perhaps the plug has pulled out of contact."

He took a step in the direction of the table, but instead of the table he knocked into the chair.

"What a stupid joke!" he said.

From the other corner of the room Rebecca's words reached him. "You see, I wasn't frightened for nothing," and a hand could be heard groping along the wall.

"But nothing terrible's happened," he replied.

"I wasn't frightened for nothing I knew something like this would happen" she reiterated, and then, to control her alarm, the surgeon almost shouted :

"Don't talk and don't worry!" At that moment he upset a glass on the table, which fell to the floor with a shocking crash.

"A trifle, a trifle," he muttered, and heard a rough whisper from the corner of the room: "Hurry up and switch on the light!"

"A trifle, a trifle," he repeated, and from force of habit smiled his lifeless, hospital smile, though nobody could see this smile. He was quite calm, and his every movement was cautious and calculated. With his delicate fingers, accustomed to the most precise work, he explored the whole table, contacted the lamp, unscrewed the bulb, then checked the contact, but without success. The lamp did not light.

"It's probably broken," he said.

Simultaneously there was a click from the switch by the door, and he heard Rebecca's voice :

"The other lamp won't light, either!"

She evidently knocked something over which fell to the floor with a crash.

"I've knocked a chair over," he heard after a moment.

"I'll switch on my torch at once," he replied.

He thought he had pushed the torch into his coat pocket, but to his annoyance could not find it there.

"Wherever can I have put it?"

His eyes quickly grew accustomed to the darkness, but it was twice as dark in the room as in the X-ray laboratory, and so in spite of everything he could still see nothing for a while. Once, something struck his shoulder, the surgeon shivered and, as if to defend himself, quickly stretched out his arms, but his hands met cool breasts, a little relaxed just then.

"You'll catch cold," he said, and groping cautiously he led Rebecca back to bed. He felt foolish and irritated by the whole affair. "Where the devil is that torch?" he muttered. Fortunately he found it by the head of the bed. "I've got it!" he exclaimed, and pushed the button.

A strong, blue ray crossed the room, broke against the wall and fixed on the ceiling in a misty splash of light, then, wandering about, lit up the door, the cupboard, the floor, and stopped at last on lovely, bare feet. The next moment one foot was raised to grow darker, and the surgeon saw that Rebecca, her body bent, was putting on her stockings rapidly, almost feverishly. "I'm curious what's happened?" she said.

"Evidently the fuses in the house have blown, or there's been a short circuit," he answered. He laid the torch on the table and went to the window.

"Don't open it!" she begged.

He opened it, nevertheless, and looked out of the window at the stormy, impenetrable night. "How dark it is!" he cried, but Rebecca did not hear his voice, for outside reigned a veritable cacophony of mutterings, howlings and thunderings of the raging tempest. The surgeon slammed the casement and jumped back, crying: "What an inferno!"

"Just imagine," he said, and Rebecca lifted her head in nervous anxiety, "the light seems to have gone out all over the city."

That made her rather quieter. "Oh!" she said, fastening her suspenders.

"The gale must certainly have damaged something at the power station. Not a single street lamp . . . not a single light . . ." said the surgeon. He looked at her with a questioning, slightly timid air. She obviously sensed this look, for she lifted her head and smiled:

"I must go now, darling. It must be very late . . ."

He looked at his watch and answered: "Seven o'clock."

She put on her shoes and stood up. She was dressing herself more slowly now, as if relishing every detail of her toilette. Now and then she threw a furtive look at the surgeon, and then the surgeon saw her glittering black eyes. She was in half-shadow. The torch lying on the table threw its light upwards, so that only the ceiling was illuminated.

The surgeon felt utterly worn out and exhausted, whether from happiness or unhappiness, and so it cost him a great effort to say:

"Listen, you've been very unkind to me, and yet, in spite of it all, I think I've forgiven . . . that I love you very much . . ."

As she did up a buckle at the back, she leaned her

head towards him and opened her mouth. The surgeon thrust aside the chair standing in his way, stepped forward and touched her lips with his, but she slipped away gracefully and said coquettishly : " Don't interfere with my dressing ! . . . " He stood still, then, in the middle of the room.

" Listen," he said gloomily. " I've forgiven you, yet this can't pass without leaving a trace. What have you done, what have you done !" . . . he repeated, then pushed back the hair that fell on his forehead. And ended : " Never mind . . . I can't disbelieve you or else . . . I'd stop loving you . . . "

She stretched out her neck again and waited with parted lips. But after a moment, he took away his arms.

" Promise me," he said, " that you'll separate from your husband. This very day, at once, as soon as you're back home, confess everything to him."

She threw her arms about him in a gesture so desperate, but at the same time so full of grace and tenderness, that he felt completely disarmed. She put her lips against his ear and breathed in a clear, serious whisper :

" All right. I'll do everything you want."

At that he was possessed of a joy and peace such as he had never known before in his life. The law of the parallelism of amorous feelings told him that she, too, was experiencing the same joy.

" You'll really do it today," said the surgeon.

" Really," she said with conviction.

" You won't lie to me any more ? " asked the surgeon.

" I never lie ! You must believe me ! . . . " she answered, and the surgeon gazed at her with an almost tearful look, as if he really were gazing at a Byzantine madonna. " Love makes saints of people ! It's as if

someone were blessing us at this moment ! ” he thought with a piety not customary with him. But Rebecca was the first to come to herself.

“ I must hurry, I must hurry,” she prattled, pouting her lips like a little girl.

“ Hurry up, hurry up,” repeated the surgeon. Then he noticed she was fidgeting again ; she turned her head to right and left, and kept on searching for something with her eyes.

“ I left my scarf with you the day before yesterday,” she said, “ I’m so silly.”

He took the scarf from the cupboard and threw it round her shoulders.

“ Oh no, no ! ” she exclaimed and asked him for a piece of paper.

“ Why don’t you want to put it on ? ” he asked unsuspectingly.

She clapped her hands. “ What a cretin you are ! ” . . . and she uttered the word “ cretin ” like the tenderest of caresses. “ I’ve got my coat, of course.” She wrapped the scarf in paper, and then put on her hat and a yellowish waterproof.

“ Let’s go ! . . . ” she cried.

In the doorway he stopped her once more and repeated :

“ Today, then, at once ! . . . It’s got to be finished with ! . . . I’m worn out with work. When you come into my life you’ll give me strength . . . and then you’ll never leave me, will you ? . . . ”

He lit up her face with his torch, saw her deep, honest glance, and heard :

“ Never ! ”

He heaved a deep sigh. All the while they went

down the stairs he could hear her voice vibrating with joy. Rebecca said that now it would not be difficult to tell her husband the whole truth, that now she was quite decided and was going to break finally with her past life.

"It's so simple, isn't it?" she said feverishly. "I couldn't live with anyone now but you! . . ."

At the entrance door she stopped.

"Put out the torch," she said.

The shadows fell again.

"Tomorrow, then," she said.

"Of course," said the surgeon. "But where?"

"Here once more . . . I've grown so used to this room . . . I'll come tomorrow at six and tell you how everything's turned out." She brushed him with her lips and hurried on to the porch.

At once they both fell as it were into a black cave where something was scraping and knocking endlessly.

"I'll take you home!" cried the surgeon.

"God forbid!" he heard a woman's voice exclaim next instant.

"I-won't-let-you-go-a-lone!" he yelled, swallowing great gulps of air.

"See-you-to-morrow!" he heard in the distance.

He waited a few minutes in the porch, turned up his coat collar, turned up the bottom of his trousers and switched on his torch. He saw the overturned barrel and the lime scattered on the pavement. The bluish ray seemed uncertain and timid. The surgeon leaped on to the pavement and with a springy, rapid step, went down the street towards All Saints' hospital.

But he had hardly gone twenty paces when he saw two shining points, coming straight towards him and

growing before his eyes. Just then the wind dispersed the clouds, and part of the sky was almost clear. The clouds broke up more and more, until at last the weather grew clear, and then it became evident that night was still far off and dusk was hardly falling. The scattered mist fled along the streets, the glistening pavement could be seen, and the house fronts. For the greater part the windows were dark, and only here and there were lights burning behind the panes.

The surgeon did not put out his torch, however. He lit the stones and puddles in front of him, yet he was so absent-minded and pre-occupied that he did not look where he was going and stepped right into the puddles. In the half-darkness of the falling dusk, the shining points coming towards him suddenly grew to the size of two head-lights. The surgeon recognised the front of a large, black limousine that was rushing along at a dizzying speed with an incessant blare of the klaxon. The limousine, its rear wheels skidding on the wet roadway and describing frightening zig-zags, tore past him, and the surgeon stood gaping after it, thunderstruck. The appearance of the limousine did not surprise him in the least, he had recognised it at once. But the terrified, patently bewildered face he saw behind the white glass in the lighted interior of the car, seemed to him something so extraordinary that he nearly cried aloud. The bearded, strained face swaying at the window tore past him, like an absolutely unbelievable image, a madman's vision ! The limousine had disappeared long since round a corner, the alarm horn died away in the distance. But still the surgeon stood planted in the middle of a puddle, letting his eyes wander heedlessly.

“ What's happened ? ” he asked aloud.

Then he lifted his head, looked at the sky, assumed

a serious air, turned on his heel and walked still faster towards the hospital.

The train of his thoughts was as follows: "I've stopped being alone. Something's happened which is really quite impossible, and who knows whether it's even necessary? Still, only a woman and a man make up a human being, and if I hadn't met Rebecca, I should have remained only half of something. We constitute an organic whole so homogeneous that I needn't fear lying or betrayal now, since I feel everything she feels and know all her thoughts." The memory of the recent conversation and of the miserable way in which he had caught Rebecca in a lie made him disgusted. "I behaved towards her like a spy!" he thought, horrified.

But in spite of everything, the memory suggested other reflections still. "And if she really did lie to me? If it were true that she's unfaithful, that she'll betray me, that sooner or later she'll leave me? What would happen then? Her conduct is sometimes such an extraordinary denial of facts, or else the facts are a denial of her conduct."

"Oh, these facts!" he growled, and with that remembered a certain detail.

"Rebecca said she didn't come yesterday because her husband was at home all the while, and she had to reassure him and talk to him about something. But how is that possible, when . . ."

Exactly. The surgeon recalled that he kept meeting Widmar throughout the whole of the preceding day, he met him at almost every step.

"A trifle, a trifle," said the surgeon, slipping on a wet stone.

He did not know how to overcome his profound melancholy. It was clear Rebecca had not been telling

the truth. How could she have talked with her husband when her husband was in town ! " She lied, she lied ! " he thought in despair.

He regained his balance, crossed to the other side of the street, and next moment went down the road leading to the hospital. His torch penetrated the lilac half-darkness, for the first time in a week the wind seemed to have dropped, the air was quiet, fresh. Now and then the figures of pedestrians passed by the surgeon. The city was still plunged in a vaporous haze, someone passing the surgeon said :

" It's quarter of an hour already since they cut off the current at the power station ! "

The surgeon repeated : " Betrayal and lying ! and she lied to me again What am I to do now ? "

In his anger he nearly hurled his torch on the pavement.

" A trifle, a trifle," he muttered, thinking proudly and with pain : " What does it matter ! I shall stay alone ! "

Now his deliberations were pursuing more or less this course.

Man is born alone and dies alone. That is fixed by the nature of things and is a law of nature. But, probably due to some fault of education, man does not treat this solitude as a *mal nécessaire*, but tries to defend himself against it, seeking a way of escape from it. Such an escape is love, whose dizzying charm is that it brings forgetfulness. But it is only a palliative. Sooner or later the charm is dissipated, and man feels his isolation with a bitterness greater than ever. Is it not better to relinquish vain efforts outright, and to come to terms with the logic of necessity ?

From the earliest age, children should be brought up in the knowledge of their hopeless solitude, but they

should also learn that this solitude is their strength. Then they may allow themselves every love, without the fear of its being broken by some disappointment. They will know, for example, that every disenchantment has only a limited duration, which depends on the individual sensibility and the intensity of feeling. Personal misfortunes, when they are neither illness nor death, do not merit any consideration, they are always transient.

General experience teaches this as well as all the libraries in the world. It is not right that every man should have to convince himself and himself remake the old path, so as in the end to arrive at the same deplorable results as his predecessors. It is much simpler to take their word for it, and to try to begin living at the very moment where they ended. Thus, for example, if the experience of another teaches that all the sufferings of love last at most for some years, and that they always pass, is it not better, instead of floundering in them, to shorten their duration? It can be proved that it is quite possible. For this, all that is required are some concentrated pills of suffering, an extract of love's torment, invented at this moment by Doctor Tamten.

The surgeon smiled bitterly and, leaving the road, took a short cut across a meadow. He jumped from tuft to tuft, avoiding the trees which, moving their branches, sprinkled him with cold drops. The surgeon approached the hospital, thinking about his pills.

It was a radical remedy, though savouring of the horse pill. According to this cure, the man who suffers must in no wise struggle within himself against either torment or pain; on the contrary, he must provoke them. In the majority of cases, the duration of suffering is dependent on the struggle fought against it. The more

violent and bitter the combat, the longer it lasts. If, on the other hand, he has understood and decides to give in to his own sufferings, if he even induces crises of the wildest despair within himself, he will soon be convinced that he lacks the strength and even the desire to prolong his despair. And so, after every blow, there is no need either to travel or to seek forgetfulness somewhere else ; the suffering must be deepened in oneself to the utmost degree. So much for suffering. As for love—it must be finally understood that it neither is nor ought to be the end of life. If it is kept on the second plane, however, then it will never be dangerous.

As the surgeon meditated, a light was suddenly lit in the large, white building that stood about a hundred paces in front of him. At the same time, the lamps went up along the streets.

The surgeon's step grew more elastic and skipping. For a moment, instead of his coat he felt his surgeon's gown on his shoulders, on his face the gauze mask, in his hand he felt that, instead of the torch, he held a bloodstained scalpel. The beloved work that had paled for a while, and grown even disgusting, now attracted him more strongly than any erotic seduction. Then the pathos of his profession rose before him. It was a terrifying vision, yet how admirable ! Across the dark meadow an endless procession of sufferers passed before him. In their hands they held bloodstained gauze and wadding, they brandished their now useless crutches above their heads. As on parade, there went filing past him, like tanks and guns, operating-tables, apparatus for X-ray, for diathermy, machines for straightening and breaking ailing limbs. Like search-lights, quartz lamps lit up that evening, and in their light, like blessed weapons of succour, sparkled all the instruments of surgery.

"Solitude and work!" exclaimed the surgeon.

But as he opened the hospital gate, he unwillingly recalled a very simple matter.

"But of course Rebecca didn't say Widmar spent the whole day at home. She only said she talked with him the whole evening. And so, in that case, she wasn't lying...."

He was ashamed of his suspicions, then, and thinking that, on the morrow, an entirely different life would begin with the woman who was going to be his companion, he said aloud: "I believe," and opened the iron gate. Before him, white and sparkling with light, rose the hospital.

It was just a quarter past seven. Exactly half an hour before, the tailor Abraham Gold had jumped down off the fence and run to Widmar's house. The short distance he had to cover was a most dreadful road for this unhappy man; it was for him a kind of Golgotha.

It was very dark, but fortunately not like it had been the previous evening. The darkness really came from the clouds and haze that rose above the city. When the wind scattered them, it grew quite clear, but next moment black cloud racks covered everything again, and then it seemed as if it were late in the still of night. It was the last day of that windy, stormy week. The gale and the storm had dropped almost at once after the tragic accident which had happened to tailor Gold, and almost immediately after the stroke of seven, everything had cleared up. It might have been thought that the unprecedented hurricane which had hurled itself from the mountains on to the city had blown and raged only to help the tailor in his desire to attain a solution decisive in his life. For tailor Gold believed, quite rightly, that this

unspeakably painful expedition of his would be the last lap in his life towards a better future.

He had but one thought : to reach Widmar as quickly as possible, tell him what he had seen, receive his money and finish at last with this dark and unpleasant business in whose toils he had been struggling for a week. Now, even had he wished, he could not have freed himself.

A week ago, tailor Gold had learned from Boruch's childish mumblings that at last someone was living in the neighbouring house. He would have attached no importance to this but for a chance happening. For that morning he saw surgeon Tamten through the window. And that morning nine-year-old Boruch had told him he had seen his client's wife go into the house. The tailor had then gone to Widmar, as he had to take him a suit, and in the hall he had met Rebecca. At sight of him, Rebecca made a movement of disgust.

" Tut, tut, tut, don't put yourself out on my account," said the tailor delicately, and he felt that the news he was going to reveal to Widmar might be equally profitable for Widmar and for him. Rebecca went back into the drawing-room and the tailor heard her say to her husband :

" Your tailor's come with a suit. What a disgusting old man ! "

" Just a moment, just a moment," replied Widmar. " Why disgusting ? "

" I don't know," she answered. " He's got such a strange smell, as if he were just going to die, or was already dead ! "

Widmar burst out laughing and went into the hall. Then he was enveloped by a swarm of dark hints thrown out by the tailor.

" Sir, dear sir," said the tailor, " are you perhaps interested in a certain window ? "

"What window?" asked Widmar, astonished. "I need a suit, not a window"

"But, my dear sir," said the tailor, "I've brought you a simply wonderfully cut suit it would also suit a man who wants to avenge himself. Please sir, I've not pulled out the tackings yet"

"You're a sick old man," said Widmar, "what do I owe you for the work?"

"Perhaps you'd pay me still more," said the tailor, "if the opportunity arose for me to be useful to you."

"Out you go!" cried Widmar, enraged, but the tailor, skipping through the door into the street, exclaimed:

"I saw surgeon Tamten through the window!"

He saw from Widmar's face that he had at last attained his object. And so he was not altogether surprised when Widmar caught him in the town park. The subsequent events developed entirely without his volition. The last few days he even felt as though bewitched by some evil power.

Now this evil power was pushing him by the shoulders, while the wind forced him backwards. The tailor walked alongside the fences and house walls, stopping now and then to rest, and then, feeling for the path with his feet, went floundering ahead again. The gale smote him on the breast. He buttoned up his soaking, rain-sodden jacket; the wind scattered a puddle in front of him, and splashed his face with mud.

"Oh dear, oh dear, oh dear!" groaned the tailor.

He went on, struggling desperately, ramming his hat on his very nose with both hands. It seemed to him that his every step was the equivalent of a leap across some deadly abyss.

He was already near Batory's statue. Forty yards at

most separated him from Widmar's house. The tailor sighed, swore, and with a gigantic effort forged ahead.

"It's not the wind, it's the devil himself!" he cried.

The current of the air was so strong, it threw him off his feet. One moment an invisible force flung him against the wall, and he almost gave up the ghost. But he breathed again, and with the courage of despair rushed to the other side of the pavement. He was shivering with cold. His wet clothes which, a moment later, were to play such a fatal role, clung to his body like intolerable rags, sodden and cold. Suddenly the sky cleared, and the tailor, blinking his eyes, saw the black silhouette of the great statesman's statue a few paces from him. Beside the statue he saw a huddled figure and guessed it was a policeman. The constable, his hands thrust up his sleeves, was hunched behind the bronze monument, seeking shelter. Next moment everything was lost in darkness, and in the terrifying hissing of scudding mists.

The tailor took another step forward and then stumbled against an uprooted telegraph pole. He realised that it was by the villa where, that Friday, the electrician, Isaac Gold, had fixed an electric installation. Tailor Gold avoided the pole, and jumped towards the railing, the sky cleared again, and the tailor saw the strands of some enormous black spider's web flying above him. Automatically he stretched out his hand to break the web that seemed to bar his path; the gale scattered the clouds and the tailor stayed motionless on the pavement, his arm outstretched in air. His head lifted spasmodically, he stiffened suddenly and gazed at the grey sky, with the same expression as if he wanted to say: "My dear sir!"

This happened a few minutes before seven. Widmar,

while waiting for him, rushed through the deserted rooms, glancing at his watch every few minutes.

“Why doesn’t he come?” he repeated. According to his calculations, the tailor ought to have been there ten minutes already, and this ten minutes’ wait exhausted him completely. “Whatever happens, whether he catches or doesn’t catch them, I can’t wait any longer, and I’ll finish with this affair today!” he mumbled, looking at his watch again. The hand—devil take it!—had not advanced by so much as a hair’s breadth. “I’ll teach him!” said Widmar, grinding his teeth. He panted and coughed. He knew he had taken the final step and that nothing could now hold him back from a tragic ending. Oh yes! He would have looked with joy, even, on that dear, precious face drowned in a mortal flood of crimson. The tailor was already a quarter of an hour late. Yet he was known for his punctuality, and the meeting was for him, too, of primary importance!

“Something must have happened!” raged Widmar, tugging his beard.

But the most far-fetched conjectures could not have told him the truth. Never would he have imagined that tailor Gold had stiffened in the middle of the pavement, gazing at the sky with his arm outstretched in air.

A passer-by saw the tailor, but as he was walking on the other side of the street he did not remark the details. He saw only a ridiculous little figure, stretched in a peculiar attitude with arm uplifted. The passer-by paid no attention to it and went on his way. However, he turned his head and gazed in astonishment at the motionless shape. The sky was grey but growing brighter all the time, so that shortly the passer-by could make out details so surprising that he turned back, took a look,

and rushed with a cry towards the policeman standing by the statue.

In the interval between one gust of wind and the next, the policeman heard the pedestrian shout as he came running up to him, but he himself had already seen the strange phenomenon standing in the middle of the pavement, and holding down the sides of his flapping coat, he rushed across to the tailor. The policeman and the pedestrian ran beside each other, elbow to elbow. They stopped at length by the pole and the pedestrian took a step as if he would grasp the tailor in his arms. But the policeman held him back with a warning cry :

“ Don't touch ! ”

The pedestrian drew back in fright, tailor Abraham Gold stayed motionless, gazing at the sky, while the policeman began gesticulating like a man who has lost his head completely. The pedestrian shouted :

“ But something must be done ! ”

The policeman went on waving his arms like a wind-mill, he was incapable of uttering a word. Then an idea evidently came into his head for he cried : “ Don't let anyone touch ! ” and, hampered by his coat, went rushing off in great leaps along the street. The wind enveloped everything in dust and smoke once more, the policeman dashed into a shop and asked breathlessly :

“ Where's the telephone ? ”

The telephone was behind the counter by the cash-desk. The policeman grabbed the receiver, but he recollected that he had forgotten the number he wanted, and so began hurriedly running through the telephone book. Then with a thick, blackened finger, he dialled the numbers on the automatic disc, and tapping his foot in nervous excitement, called into the receiver : “ Hallo, hallo, hallo ! ”

At the same moment in the local power station, the telephone buzzed delicately in the chief engineer's room. Seated at his desk, the engineer lifted the receiver to his ear and said several times :

“ I can't hear anything Please speak more clearly ! ”

But next moment, he obviously understood the words vibrating in the receiver, for without a word he at once cut off the telephone.

The policeman, pulling his nose and absently moving his jaws about, tried to contact another post by telephone. He again cried : “ Hallo, hallo, hallo ! ” The chief engineer, however, keeping the receiver to his ear, switched to another line and next instant was in touch with the machine room. And only then, when one of the workers answered, did the chief engineer, with his hand to his mouth, say forcibly :

“ Man in contact with high tension wire ! Switch off ! ”

Immediately after, the alarm signal blared in the machine room. In obedience to this funereal sound, the operator Isaac Gold, standing near the switchboard, seized the lever at once and moved it through a hundred and eighty degrees. At that the lights went out all over the city. Keeping his hand on the lever, the switchboard-operator Isaac Gold shouted across the machine room :

“ What's up ? Blast you ! ”

The going out of the light at All Saints' hospital provoked a two-fold panic. It was supper-time, the patients were scattering to the wards, and so there were only the matron and the attendant Paul on the first floor. The matron was carrying a tray of medicaments. The attendant held a wooden electric heater in both hands.

They walked towards each other, and as they crossed the matron asked the attendant :

“ Do you know, Paul, whether that woman’s relatives have come ? ”

The attendant knew whom she was talking about and replied :

“ We’ve taken the body to the mortuary chapel. Up to now nobody’s claimed her ”

They exchanged a few more words, and Paul complained that nothing was going right for him that day.

“ I’ve just broken four bulbs in this heater, matron.”

The matron sighed. “ You can’t help it There are days like that At least it’s a good thing the superintendent didn’t operate on anyone else after that accident.”

“ I was terribly frightened of the superintendent today,” began the attendant and broke off. At that very moment the lights went out.

Neither the matron nor the attendant stirred : the matron was afraid of breaking her tray of medicaments, the attendant clutched his electric heater convulsively.

“ Damnation ! Now what’s the matter ? ” cried the attendant, finally setting the heater on the floor. “ I’m sorry, matron ! ”

It was dark in the corridor, and only the windows gleamed in grey rectangles. The matron walked cautiously up to the window and laid her tray on the sill.

“ Light a match, Paul, and we’ll go and look for candles,” she said. “ There must be some in the pantry.”

The door of the general ward opened. The figure of a patient appeared in the corridor, and then another door opened and someone asked : “ What’s happened, matron, why isn’t there any light ? ”

"There will be in a minute," replied the matron and went to the pantry with the attendant. Somebody met them on the stairs crying: "I've checked the fuses, everything's all right!"

That moment, down below on the ground floor rose a shrill, crystalline, penetrating ringing. The matron, who was stooping in the pantry, heard the ringing and turned her head. The attendant turned as well and said:

"Yes, it is, matron."

"But isn't there anyone downstairs?" cried the matron.

The crystalline, penetrating ringing rose again, still more piercing and importunate. At that, the matron threw the packet of candles on the floor, took hold of a candle-stump, murmuring, while the attendant wasted match after match lighting it: "What a really unlucky day!"

The ringing was heard for the third time. The matron rushed breathlessly into the corridor, and ran downstairs with extraordinary speed, considering her plumpness. She reached the telephone that was ringing and picked up the receiver.

"First-aid post!" she called. "Who's speaking?"

"A police constable here! A man's been electrocuted!"

"Where?" she asked.

"Batory Street, near the statue," vibrated the instrument, and the matron put down the receiver

Until now she had acted with speed and precision, maintaining a relative calm, but next moment she recollected something and lost her head.

The attendant Paul was standing by her in the corridor, he was rubbing his hands and puffing his cheeks,

so that it might have been imagined he was contorted with stifled laughter.

The ambulance was already waiting at the entrance gate with the driver sounding the horn impatiently. The matron and the attendant stood face to face in the half-darkness of the corridor and looked into each other's eyes, both thinking at once of the same thing. The matron came to herself first.

"What are you laughing at, Paul?" she cried reproachfully. And then she asked timidly: "Is the superintendent there?"

"He's gone to town!" answered the attendant with a strange little cough. Then the matron asked, still more timidly:

"And Doctor Rubinski?"

"He's gone to town!" replied the attendant, coughing behind his hand.

"In that case, there's only the doctor on duty!" cried the matron, clasping her hands.

She controlled herself, however, and puffing and groaning, candle-stump in hand, ran to the duty-room on the first floor. There sat Doctor Boguski, sharpening a pencil.

When the matron ran in, he stood up quickly and asked:

"What's happened? A hæmorrhage?"

"An accident in town!" exclaimed the matron, hardly able to control herself.

"Very well," rejoined the old man, "very well, I'll hurry there at once!"

"No, doctor! . . . They've asked for the ambulance!" cried the matron in despair.

But house-physician Boguski had already rushed out of

the duty-room. Next moment he appeared on the steps at the entrance, with the matron and the attendant running behind him. The senior house-physician saw the black limousine with its red crosses on the windows and stood still like a man about to faint. The matron automatically moved her shoulder near him and touched him with her elbow, ready to support him, but in the same instant house-physician Boguski straightened himself and sprang towards the car.

"Where do you get in?" he muttered.

He would have sat beside the driver, but he could not manage to open the door, and groaned:

"Quicker, quicker!"

The engine roared, the hood vibrated; dumbfounded, the driver stared at the old doctor. Then he took off his cap, laid it on the seat beside him, and again stared at Boguski with starting eyes.

"Will you travel by car doctor?" he asked at last.

The senior house-physician stumbled; the attendant opened the door at the back for him and the old man, growing angry, tapped his foot:

"I?—by car? But why shouldn't I go by car? I always travel in cars!"

He stumbled again, then tumbled down outright, falling into the ambulance, and when the driver asked at what speed he should go, he cried, with tears in his voice:

"Exceed all speed limits for the devil's sake!"

The car roared, the body vibrated still more. The car set off, moving quickly, and the old doctor tumbled on to the white bench.

“ Drive faster ! ” he cried.

Swaying gently on its springs, the ambulance reached the wide-open gate, ran out on to the highway and changed speed suddenly. It darted ahead like an arrow, vanished in the half-darkness, and for only a minute longer could the glare of the head lamps be seen, describing menacing arcs in the air

It was a few minutes after seven, the time when the gusts of wind were most violent, and the storm had unleashed all the elements. It was dark in the streets, not a solitary lamp was lit, and in the haze glimmered the rare shadows of hurrying pedestrians.

At this very moment, driven to a paroxysm of rage by his vain wait, Widmar struck a match again and looked at his watch. The hand had moved only a few minutes. Widmar coughed and panted so violently that the matches went out in his hand, one after another, as if in a draught. He could not find a candle, and so in the darkness he went up to the open window and looked out, leaning his chest and stomach on the window-seat. A gust of warm air ruffled his beard and pushed tufts of hair into his open mouth, then it tore the tie out of his waistcoat and whipped his fear-distorted face with it.

There was a moment of calm, the clouds scattered in every direction, and there was a greyish light in the streets. Only at the corner where Widmar's garden stood out beyond the railings with its yellow, rust-coloured leaves, the concierge was standing.

“ Why has the light gone out ? ” shouted Widmar in a harsh voice.

“ It's all over the city,” replied the concierge. Golden, blood-red and orange leaves were flying above

him, but next moment the wind began again, the sky grew overcast and once more nothing could be seen.

In this impenetrable dusk, the ambulance went rushing down Batory Street, the attendant Paul pressing on the klaxon button without respite; the horn blared excruciatingly, the speed indicator showed a speed of seventy miles an hour. Suddenly the back wheels skidded on the damp roadway, yet the driver pressed down the accelerator and stepped on the gas. The vehicle righted itself, and the attendant Paul, sitting beside the driver, thought someone in the ambulance was making an inhuman outcry.

The lights of the head-lamps cut the road slantwise. With a whistling, the car, like an arrow, rushed along the road sideways, and it was a miracle the tyres did not burst against the curb. Surgeon Tamten was walking along the edge of the pavement. It grew clear once more, but nevertheless, surgeon Tamten did not switch out his torch, he put his foot in a puddle, turned round and stood petrified.

He stood in the middle of the pavement, stunned, open-mouthed, speechless. The torch almost fell from his hand. The car passed with a terrifying blare. Surgeon Tamten had immediately recognised his ambulance, he also saw from a distance the driver and the attendant Paul, and then the windows of the car, which was lighted inside, sparkled in front of him. Behind the white window he recognised the old, bearded face of the house-physician Boguski, and could hardly restrain a cry. This pale, distorted face swayed at the window and disappeared with the car. The limousine had long since been swallowed up in the haze, the alarm horn died away slowly in the distance, but the surgeon stayed in the middle of a puddle, letting his eyes wander heedlessly.

"What's happened?" he cried aloud. Then he raised his head and, serious and severe, walked faster still towards the hospital.

At the same time in tailor Gold's lodgings, his children, Boruch and Angela, were playing hide-and-seek as if nothing had happened. In these lodgings the going out of the light did not have a great effect. It was a Friday and on the table, covered with a white cloth, candles were burning.

"Look," said Angela: "all the lamps in the street have gone out!" She had black, curly hair, dirty little paws and a sooty nose.

"I've got a lamp in my stomach!" replied Boruch sulkily. He was a queer creature, this youngster.

Little Angela, at that instant, stopped playing, sat down under the window and burst into tears.

"Why doesn't daddy come? He ought to be back."

"Daddy's got a lamp in his stomach," whispered the youngster. He was the oddest child. He gazed at the seven candles burning on the table, and then looked out of the window: mist and reddened leaves.

"Hear the horn?" he asked. "That's a car."

The wind sang a plaintive song, it drew near and flew away. Behind the clouds appeared an autumn sky, cold and high, and near Widmar's house, at the street crossing, maples and planes were glowing with a dying radiance.

Old Widmar ran out hatless on to the porch. He thought someone had knocked, first at the window and then at the door, but there was nobody there. The wind hurled a heap of bright leaves in his face. Widmar started brandishing his fist:

"But I haven't time now to wait for him any longer!" Mutterings of rage and sobs burst from his throat. At the corner of the street in front of the house porch, he kept walking up and down.

"I shan't learn anything," he murmured despairingly, "I shan't learn anything." Suddenly, through the singing plaint of the wind came the throbbing of an engine and the blare of a horn. The weather had almost quite cleared up. Just then a ray from the setting sun pierced through the smoke and mist, and a little cloudlet glowed blood-red over the roof of a white building with several storeys, situated at the end of the town. It was All Saints' hospital.

The ambulance slackened speed and then halted by the great statesman's statue. The attendant Paul opened the door and jumped out first. And at once there was a smell of iodoform, ether and stuffiness in the street. Without so much as looking at the pavement where tailor Gold, spasmodically contorted, was lying, the attendant ran quickly round the ambulance, but Doctor Boguski was already getting slowly out. He was covered in sweat. His face was redder than the crosses painted on the car windows.

Yet he asked calmly: "Where's the patient?" and the attendant Paul scratched his ear.

Round tailor Gold's body a small group of pedestrians had already gathered. The policeman went up to the senior house physician and saluted him.

"An accident, doctor. Some man took hold of the high tension cable."

But the old man did not hear any more. He had squatted down with the sides of his doctor's coat lying on the wet pavement. The old doctor picked up the

tailor's hand, and for a long time searched in vain for the pulse. Then he stooped over his frozen, distorted mouth and sniffed. He smelt the familiar, sweetish odour of the dissecting-room, of the corpse, of death.

One of the gaping onlookers observed : " His clothes were wet, that's what killed him easier ! "

The old doctor stood up, shook his head, and then told the attendant to carry the body into the ambulance.

" Are you coming back with us, doctor ? " asked the attendant.

The old man grew angry again and tapped his foot :

" No ! " he cried impatiently. " I prefer to walk ! " And just as he was, hatless, in his white coat, pencil in hand, he went off with the halting gait of old age.

At the selfsame moment Widmar, fidgeting up and down in front of his house-steps, noticed a figure approaching him.

He at once recognised his wife. She appeared at the corner and came towards him with a calm, decided step. She was wearing a raincoat with a close-fitting little leather hat. Under her arm she carried a packet wrapped in newspaper.

Widmar felt himself choking in the throat, and at the same time a sharp pain pierced his weak heart. " It's all the same ! " he thought, " I can't go back now ! " He looked round him vaguely, seeing blood-red puddles on the road and on the path, while the autumn trees were overshadowed by reddish mist. Widmar stepped forward and with brutal force seized his wife by the elbow.

" Where have you been ? " he cried. " Where are you going every day at the same time ? "

He grasped her convulsively with one hand ; the other he slowly lifted up until at last his clutching fingers touched her lovely, round neck. He felt the warmth of the skin, and in spite of himself his fingers began to close around it. " It's all the same ! " he thought.

" At the cinema," she replied calmly.

" You're lying ! " he exclaimed. He looked into her eyes. In the half-shadow he could make out only their glittering flash, but at the same time it seemed to him they were full of a smiling serenity and love. Then, intimidated and enervated by a kind of hope, the breath stifled in his breast, he groaned :

" Rebecca do you love me ? "

With her warm, delicate hand, she stroked his forehead and brushed back the hair on his temples. Under her arm she carried a little packet containing her scarf.

" You know I do," she replied. " Why do you ask ? "

He seized her hand in both of his and pressed it to his face. The hand was fragrant with familiar perfumes, and with some other scent, but he did not even guess that this strange scent was a masculine and characteristic one.

Another wave of jealousy shook him violently. Widmar brought out :

" You're betraying me with Doctor Tamten, for sure ! "

He did not take his eyes off her. And again he saw her look : clear, loving, kind.

" My darling," she said. " How foolish you are ! You must believe me. You can see for yourself perfectly well how this surgeon bores me. He comes to us every other day, sits there and hardly says a thing " Then she added solicitously : " Why do you torture yourself ? Can't you feel I'm faithful to you ? "

"No, it would be impossible that she's lying! She's certainly not lying!" thought Widmar with unspeakable joy, and at last he felt through all his being that his wife was speaking the truth. He found her lips and there, in the street, kissed her without shame. As he did so he trembled, for he felt the secret, loving caress of her hand.

He grew more and more defenceless. The experiences of the last week seemed a nightmare and a monstrous iniquity, a despicable meanness on his part. Everybody was always wanting to slander her, perhaps from jealousy, perhaps from stupidity. But how could he, her one real friend, have joined that wretched gang? Compromising facts? There were none, only gossip! The operation and the extra-uterine pregnancy? Lies and pitiable fabrications of that scoundrel Rubinski! The window and surgeon Tamten's bachelor-flat? Vulgar blackmail of a half-dead tailor! For money, every man can be slandered

"Rebecca!" mumbled Widmar, beside himself with joy: "You've never betrayed me and never will? Will you?"

"Never," she answered, and then added impatiently: "Why don't you believe me?"

Then, utterly broken, but at the same time infinitely happy, Widmar said, humble and ashamed:

"Please forgive me."

"There's no need," she replied simply.



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